ゲーマー兄妹は強くて「ユーゲームがお嫌い」なようです
ノーゲーム・ノーライフ
NO GAME NO LIFE
5
著／イラスト●榎宮祐
MF文庫J

ただ《Prayer(にんぎょう)》らしく他人の顔色を窺い。
いるとも知れぬ《Player(にんげん)》に祈った。
せめて人形の演目が、
人間の役に立ちますようにとそう祈り、笑い続けた。

不安も恐怖もあろうはずがない。
――この手を繋いでいる限り。
――誰にも負ける気がしない。
シロ
「……にぃ……？」

「――全身全霊渾身全力の一〇〇％
――『天撃』――
――まいります♥」

Prologue - Normal Start

Part 1

"Over 7 billion players online now! Moving towards a future of infinite possibilities – Create a story that is truly your own!"

… Reality.

From a broader perspective, our precious lives are but a game.

Just hearing that attractive slogan makes us want to imagine being part of it.

Exactly as the title states, the game called "Life", is truly an epic game that lasts for a lifetime.

Game start.

First, you cooperate with your parents and automatically begin the process of character customization.

After receiving blessings from your father, mother and many others in a touching opening cutscene, you can finally begin controlling your main character.

Even though the controls take a while to get used to, you eventually learn them, and you are thrown into a hub of social competition – school.

The realm where this game takes place in – Earth.

We were thrown in a corner of this gigantic map, and faced a massive sandbox game. We saw the slogan and were instantly hooked, but we quickly noticed –

-- "We were tricked".

Infinite possibilities – Well, this statement may not be false.

But the catch to this game was, no one told us that we could do things our own way.

Disadvantages were caused by insufficient character levels, experience points, funds and not to mention spawn location.

Seemingly endless shackles ruined the freedom allowed in this game.

However, we continued to work hard.

Trusting in the fanciful slogan, we constantly fell down and picked ourselves up.

We truly believed that we possessed infinite potential.

So, we engrossed ourselves in raising our levels, farming experience and earning money.

Despite our complaints about the unfair conditions given due to the "Talents" or "Qualities" and other skills we received during random character customization, we did not give up, but relied on "Effort" to increase our experience points, endlessly working hard – That's the kind of game "Life" is.

This really is a story that motivates and touches the heart, isn't it?

- But, that has no meaning at all.

No matter how high your score is, you will never be able to beat this game.

This is because even though your level, experience points and funds have reached the cap, you will still suffer – in this case being ostracized.

Why?

- Because of putting in "Too much effort".

Because even if it is something acquired by "Effort".

Others will still claim it is completely unfair.

When you own "Something that others do not", they will undoubtedly claim that it is unfair

Because of that, we were “Punished”.

Receiving punishment from seven billion other players, shackles were imposed on us.

At this point, a thought flashed through our heads –

- Does freedom truly exist in this game?

No matter what choices we made, we would still receive criticisms from society, other players or from god-knows-where.

Even if we accepted the criticisms and continued on with the game, as long as we once again wished to achieve success, the same fate would befall upon us.

Looking back on it all, we realized –

Our actions were not carried out upon free will.

The path we have walked, was only a pre-regulated path built according to a combination of the wishes and commands from others.

When we realized were merely – “Walking a path built by others”…

Our suspicions were only confirmed.

No mistake about it, this massive scam called “Life” was no doubt a massive and vast sandbox game.

The thing is – The players were not ourselves.

So we unconsciously lowered our heads and looked down at our hands.

- Looking at those hands bound by infinite but yet infinitesimally small ropes, our suspicions turned into confirmations.

So we unconsciously surveyed our surroundings.

- Looking at the others around us bound by infinite yet infinitesimally small ropes, our confirmations turned into understanding.

As long as we shook our heads, we would hear creaking noises, which was when the gamer siblings realized.

All the players were actually puppets. Everyone was adhering to the countenances of others and fulfilling their preset role in this game called “Life”. Just like puppets in a puppet show – Just like NPCs.

So, after you've considered the above, let me just ask one question.

“For what reason are you living?”

- Is your answer to this question, truly based on your own free will?

- ……

- This is the world as seen through the eyes of a <Puppet (NPC)>.

The <Puppet> did not question this truth in the ten years since the game began.

The soulless <Puppet> did not feel anxious nor worried when faced with that truth.

Just like <Prayers>, we only look upon the faces of others, and make requests to <Players> though we are not even sure if they exist.[1]

All it prays for is that the tricks would one day bring about some sort of benefit to mankind.

- Until that day.

Part 2

Elven Gard – Tillnog County, Lower Miguel

This was merely a district within the territory of the faction with the largest amount of land, stretching three continents and 52 states.

Located southeast of the capital, close to the kingdom of the Dwarves – Harden Fell.

- It is the city of those who were born in and would receive the blessings of the forest, the elves.

The architecture found there was completely different compared to the Imanity's – Elchea.

In the center of the city lies a “Heaven Tree” – With one branch stretching up and beyond the clouds, an unbelievably large tree towered, with its roots tangled at the forest floor like blood vessels, expanded by the elves to form a network of roads. Houses and street lights tangle and merge with the stumps and vines growing from the earth, filling the cracks and bumps between the pavements.

That fashion of architecture was completely unlike flattening forests and reclaiming land to build “buildings” made of brick and stone.

This could only be done through well-practiced and potent magic, truly a “Living City”.

Within the streets that were one with nature, there lies a particularly large mansion.

That is the residence of the mayor – Ron Barter.

At that time, a young lady was passing by the the gates that were embroidered with rosebuds.

She had a mane of silky golden hair with a few curls.

A pair of pointed ears signified an Elven heritage, and the ruby on her forehead produced faint streaks of light when struck by the sun's rays.

The person coming out to receive the girl was a man that looked as if he had just entered old age, similarly had pointed ears, and was dressed in clothes clearly meant for higher echelons of society.

“Welcome, Miss Fii, or should I call you Miss Nilvalen?”

The girl known as Fii replied gently in a diplomatic voice,

“I don't mind what you call me, Barter, for I have not officially inherited the position of the head of the family.”

The man - Barter hearing her reply, curled up the corners of his mouth into an evil smile.

He stepped back, spread out his arms, and invited Fii into the mansion completely made of flora.

“To allow a young maiden to travel so far just to visit my humble home, I offer my sincerest apologies.”

“Fufu, your talent for flattery sure has not deteriorated in the slightest, I see.”

“I never thought you would say something like that. I may be old, but I believe my ability to appreciate beautiful flowers has not been lost…. Despite the fact that you are nothing but an ugly weed compared to my garden, of course.”

“A flower that is being appreciated can still bloom, you know. Oh, I should also mention that the time it takes to do so is the same as well~”

While the two of them were walking, their smiles did not diminish even by a fraction, however during the entire trip, they did not look at each other at all.

Barter led Fii into the main hall.

In the center of the hall, decorated by various flowers and plants, laid a table and two chairs.

As Fii sat down, Barter took a seat on the other end as well.

“This must be extremely boring for both of us, so let's get straight to the point.”

He jumped right into the main issue without beating around the bush.

“For this round of senatorial elections - Nilvalen, may I request that you withdraw?”

Barter addressed Fii by her family name directly, as though it were a command instead of a request.

- Despite the fact that Fii had said she didn't mind what she was addressed as – There was an unspoken rule within the circle of nobles in Elfen Gard, which was….

Addressing someone directly by their family name was akin to an insult.

However, Fii maintained her composure and continued smiling with not even a twitch of the eyebrow.

“Is that all?”

“Of course not, I also request that you personally recommend me for the elections, officially under your family name of Nilvalen.”

“Oh~ so that's how it is.”

“Yes, the election deposits and earnest money would also be your responsibility. Another thing, a close friend of mine, Sir Castor Lesto desires your Golden Dragon Bone Harp, as long as you give it to him, he will recommend me for this round's elections.”

“Hmm…that's my family heirloom, you know! Previously, an entire city was traded in exchange for it–“

“That is what I heard as well, I'm sure he would enjoy this gift very much.”

The corners of his mouth twisted once again, revealing a cunning smile.

His eyes drooped downwards, with his line of sight directly fixated upon her large and supple breasts.

“I won't force you to make the decision right away of course, so why don't you stay over tonight. We need to sit down nice and proper and have an 「all-night」 talk regarding how our relationship should proceed from here? Hmm?”

“No matter how a person's outward appearance is decorated, the personality will remain the same you know?”

Fii replied, almost failing to hold back her laughter.

“Essentially you want money, land and women right? In this current age, I would imagine that even mountain bandits would have more reasonable demands.”

“That is because they know their place as small fries. Don't you think that a person of my position and caliber deserves to request for correspondingly important demands?”

“I completely disagree, but if you want to think that way, then it's your own decision~?”

Fii continued to maintain the smile on her face, then replied:

“So, you think I would accept that kind of request, are you drunk or something?”

“Haha, compared to being drunk, I prefer being intoxicated by the beauty of flowers. You should have known I would have these kinds of demands, but you still came here, didn't you? Anyway – “

Barter snapped his fingers once.

As she sensed an Elemental Gallery being accessed, a tea set with steam still billowing out of it appeared on the table.

A piece of tissue paper as though dancing through the air, gently landed in front of Fii's position at the table.

“… As the current vice-congresswoman, you actually attempted to liberate the slaves – If you're not afraid of me exposing you, you could always refuse the deal? Sounds good to you?”

Hearing the threatening words spoken by Barter, Fii continued smiling nonetheless.

She merely inspected the piece of paper on the table wordlessly.

The content written on it was simple, merely a record of Fii and her group's affiliation with the act and also evidence regarding the matter.

If the laws regarding slaves were removed, the society of the Elves would not be able to remain stable, thus her actions were likened to a crime.

If this list were to be exposed to the public, it would not be a surprise if Fii and the others were convicted with treason –

"Since you've already dug up so much information about us, why don't you go ahead and expose us?"

"I personally believe in free will, and only do things that would benefit me personally, what good would it do me if I went ahead and exposed your little tricks?"

"So you're using this to threaten me instead? Freedom really is the best, isn't it?"

"Threaten? There you go again with such strong words… I am only offering suggestions to a silly woman. I will train you properly, so how about you kneel down and beg like a dog for forgiveness? Hmm?"

"I appreciate it, but no thank you – How about we get straight to the topic here?"

"Hah, you really can't wait, can you? Hmm? – Fine then."

After Barter spoke these words, he snapped his fingers yet again.

A complex-looking magical formation appeared out of thin air, and a deck of cards materialized from the center of it.

"The game is 「Oracle Cards」 – I trust that this does not need explaining?"

Oracle Cards.

A game popular among the Elves, where twenty-two magical cards are used for combat purposes.

- It is also a dangerous game used to settle disputes.

For someone with weaker magical ability like Fii, it would be a disadvantageous duel.

By the 「Ten Oaths」, the challenged party, Fii, had the right to select the game. But then –

"So, let us now decide upon what each of us are willing to bet."

Fii carefully answered her opponent with her line of sight directly fixated upon him, her expression ever unchanging.

Both were deciding the requests that would be fulfilled under the absolute authority of the 「Oaths」.

"Well then, I want all your personal rights – and you will belong to me for the rest of your life, if I win, of course."

"We want you to forget everything related to our efforts, and assist us unconditionally to any extent."

- This was a reasonable demand.

If Barter were to acquire Fii, he would acquire everything to her family name and also her virginity.

On the other hand, Fii's demand was for him to relinquish all his evidence that he could use threaten them, and also to drain his personal savings dry as revenge by acquiring his services.

"No problem – but for a third-rate thug like you, it's best that you don't think about winning too much, you know… When imagination goes overboard, it becomes fantasy you know?"

"Your obvious attempts at bluffing are really entertaining, hmm? Does the disgrace of the Nilvalen family really think she can beat me?"

After a brief exchange of taunts and loaded glances – Both parties immediately swore on the pledges.

「「Acciente」」

As though corresponding with the spoken word, the spells cast on the table were activated, and the game began.
Barter and Fii were both given twenty-two cards each.

Their cards automatically hovered in the air at fixed positions, shuffling themselves at an angle where the opponent was unable to see the card's face.
After, both would draw cards of equal amount and type, then battle face-to-face.

- This was the game known as 「 Oracle Cards」 .

The simple game played with tarot cards then began.

- When both parties of the game are elves, cheating with magic is almost impossible.

Because both parties are able to detect each other's spells and Elemental Galleries, if any party attempts to use magic to cheat, it would be impossible, thus Elves particularly enjoy playing automatically controlled games powered by magic like this.

Among which, this game known as Oracle Cards, was particularly popular for its entertainment value and for its victory conditions.
“Set two cards down.”

Fii spoke one simple sentence, and immediately two cards disappeared from the deck floating in the air.

At the same time, those two cards materialized on the table instantly in a face-down position. Barter smiled, and said:
“Set two cards down.”

This time, it was Barter's cards that landed face-down on the table.

Both would use the two cards they had each drawn to decide the victor of the match.

Barter then uttered, rather impatiently:

“How about we reveal our cards?”

“Fine~ now then-“

The two competitors simultaneously spoke a single word.

「 「 “Draw” 」 」

Immediately after the word was uttered, both their cards simultaneously flipped over.

In an instant – the surrounding air seemed to have imploded upon itself, as massive amounts of energy were drawn out of the Elemental Gallery.
The cards Barter drew were 「 Strength」 and 「 The Chariot」 .

The combination of the cards was known as - 「 Fame is Power」 .

Fii's cards were 「 The Fool」 and 「 The Lover」 .

「 Love is Insanity」 .

The cards belonging to both parties began to emit a bright light, and semi-transparent images began to materialize in front of them.
Barter had summoned a fully armored knight that immediately drew its sword and began its attack.

And the figure that was summoned from Fii's cards was instead a half-naked maiden with an expression of exquisite pain.

The maiden moved gracefully as if she were a dancer, grabbed the knight's neck and softly spoke a few sentences into his ear.
The knight raised its head as though it was very troubled – then turned his blade in the other direction.

He turned around while carrying the maiden, and slashed his sword towards the one that had summoned him instead - Barter.

- Created by the seventh most powerful among the 「Exceed」, and the most adept with magic, the elves.

This was the game of cards that could only be created through the harnessing of that magic.

The 「Return Seal」 spell that was triggered on the cards harnessed the mindless violence emanating from the knight and redirected it towards Barter.

His response to this was – Muttering a few words, stretching out his palm, and instantly conjuring a defensive shield.

Two magical formations appeared from thin air, to block the sword of the knight.

An extremely large noise echoed throughout the room, and a jet of bright light burst forward.

Large amounts of spirits exploded and burst through the entire courtyard progressively, then disappeared.

Despite bearing such a powerful counter-attack, Barter still appeared to be unaffected.

"Actually using a combination to reflect my attacks since the beginning, it appears that even the cowardly weakling is afraid of being injured, hmm?"

Fii likewise replied with an unwavering smile.

"Avoiding risks in the first hand of cards is a perfectly reasonable strategy, you know. And I would feel frustrated as well if the victor was decided instantly in that fashion."

"Hehe, that's exactly the reason why others can't put up with you…. Using that sort of tricks in games, you clearly don't understand the style of play, so how about I teach you a lesson about the methods that are up to standards truly befit for one of noble descent, hmm?"

Essentially, this is a game of 'Oracle Cards' (Magical Tarot Cards).

- This was the ultimate duel game played by the seventh ranked race, the Elves.

Both participants have the same twenty-two cards, and every turn two are drawn to form a combination.

Combinations not only consist of raw power, but also possess different affinities, and the losing party will suffer an 「Attack」 of power corresponding with the ability of the combination used.

And those attacks can only be blocked by the magic of the player.

Used cards will be dumped into the graveyard, and after eleven rounds – meaning after all the cards are used, both parties will be given the option of surrendering or continuing the game. If the option to continue is selected, both players will be given another twenty-two cards and restart the duel – as long as one party is unable to continue the game, then victory will be decided.

There are a total of two hundred and thirty-one combinations – predicting and countering each one of them would be an impossible feat.

Hence the key to victory would be 「Dodging attacks」.

- Also a test used to gauge the standards of aspiring Elven mages.

Those who are able to 「Quadruple Cast」 would be only the best mages, despite Barter being incapable doing so, he was still a very capable 「Triple Caster」.

While Fii, on the other hand –

" – You are only barely capable enough to 「Double Cast」 even after using that kind of runic magic and the support soul gems used by beginners. Do you really think that with that kind of standard, you, the disgrace of the Nilvalen family, can triumph over me, hmm?"

- No doubt about it, in this game, victory is decided by the skill of one's magic.

The amount of spells that one can cast simultaneously – also represents the strength of one's magic and the times one has used it.

Fii that could barely reach the standard of a Double Caster, to wish of defeating a Triple Caster like Barter, would be an impossible feat.

However Fii merely laughed nonchalantly. “Yes, of course I do think that way! You're already becoming this cocky even only after blocking this first attack. How about you land a hit on me first before you act so savagely, hmm?”

Then, she glanced upward momentarily.

The movement of the spirits had not ceased, and the second floor of the mansion was visible from the central courtyard with petals still flying about from the aftershock of the previous explosion.

Fii glanced through a window on the second floor – a girl with black hair and clothes – the shadow of her 「Partner」 walking was visible, and the corners of her mouth faintly had a ghost of a smile.

No doubt about it, this magic game had absolutely no room for the Imanity who could not use or detect magic.

As long as they took a single hit, they would definitely lose, thus it wouldn't even be considered a game.

But – images of two people flashed through her mind's eye.

A young man and a little girl wearing expressions of pride and condescension, but at the same time carrying a hint of sadness –

- Why do you insist on taking on the opponent head-on?

Also –

“The game ended before it even began, you know?”

Part 3

“…Cheh, that bastard Barter.”

Observing the duel taking place in the central courtyard from the second floor with a bird's-eye view, Barter's butler, Fritz, rudely swore.

- From his master's deal, his ulterior motives were obvious.

Grasping his opponent's weakness, forcing the opponent into a game she couldn't possibly win, and win over her personal rights.

As long as he were to defeat that woman, the house of Nilvalen's vote, power, money and of course the one thing more precious than gold – breasts, would all belong to him.

Despite Barter's expression being generically villainous and composed, he was almost certainly thinking of what he would do after he achieved victory.

He most definitely was thinking how he would enjoy that massive pair of breasts in bed at night.

How could he be so certain? Because he who was standing in the blind spot of the woman, helping Barter block the 「Attacks」 from her cards, was also thinking of nothing but gigantic breasts.

Also the most important things related to women were her breasts, looks, butt, waist, and legs, and not to mention these were only accessories as compared to her breasts for accompaniment, valued just about as much as the napkins one would receive at a restaurant for lunch.

Her intelligence? Her skill with magic? Those were completely unimportant.

- Essentially, Fii was exactly Fritz's type of girl.

“Ah, to meet in a place like this, it really is a coincidence. Barter's butler… Your name is Fritz, right?”

“ -?! You are Nilvalen's –“

Fritz desperately turned around, and was staring at a black-haired and black-clothed Imanity… Nilvalen's slave.

'Her name was Kurami I think,' Fritz thought while rendered speechless.

“Cheh, you flat-chested woman, dont simply approach me.”

Just being spoken to by a pitifully flat-chested Imanity was already bad enough.
Also he had no time to entertain her words.

Because he had more important things to do, those being to simultaneously assist Barter and enjoy the view of Fii's chest – and as the flat-chested one probably couldn't read his inner thoughts, she continued to speak in a calm tone:

"To meet in a place like this must also be the doing of fate, how about you 「Challenge me」 to a game?"

"… Watch your words, you lackey. At least let your chest grow three times bigger before you talk, you inferior being."

Hearing the words carrying condescending, insulting and infinitely other meanings, the girl still maintained the smile on her face.
"Words... huh? How about something like –"

Her glance immediately sharpened. "I wish to expose you and Barter's cheating – what do you think about these words?"
"… I don't know what you're talking about."

"You were thinking of saying Imanity aren't capable of detecting magic – right?"

"……."

While remaining silent, the flat-chested girl instead shook her head as though acting in a play.

"That definitely is the case, for example… Note that this is merely an example. For example, for a Double Caster to defeat a Triple Caster would of course be difficult, but not impossible, but if you assist Barter in deflecting her 「Attacks」, then this game for you of course would be a 「Guaranteed Victory」; and I who of course have no ability to detect magic would be unable to prove it, thus my master – Fii is in a lot of danger here."
"……."

However – the flat-chested girl chuckled while covering her mouth, and continued:

"Actually I have no need to actively expose you. Because you will admit it anyway."

"… What?"

"Ill say this again, do you want to 「Challenge me」 to a game? Because if you refuse –"
The girl revealed a cunning smile, and produced a small gemstone. "You have been using Barter's funds to produce 「Highly concentrated magical potion」, and have been secretly selling it to the Dwarves – the neighboring country, I will report this to the police and ruin your reputation – what do you think of this phrasing?"
"What-!?"

Fritz let out a cry that sounded as if it were a wail. Understandable, of course.

The gemstone that Kurami was holding in her hand, was coincidentally the potion he was selling – a prohibited product.

"Compressing and liquefying spirits then absorbing them to increase the amount of spirits in one's body. This is a potion created to boost magical powers, but it also has side effects – no, it should be mentioned that it was exactly because of these side effects that result in massive amounts of people abusing this drug, and thus it was banned."
And that side effect was –

"The adrenaline rush and feeling invincible after an overdose, is just like those acquired from drugs."

"……!"

"You should understand the situation by now right? Quickly challenge me to a game, or else you will have no other options."

Kurami spoke with an unbelievably sinister and cunning smile on her face, and Fritz who was looking directly into that frightful expression couldn't help but twitch the corners of his mouth slightly in fear.

It's impossible.

Just end it there.

"… Ugh!"

No, I must endure it, I can't do it yet, must not laugh yet…!

Laughing at a pitiful flat-chested girl who thinks she possesses an advantage despite only having a bit of information, would be too shameful!

Fritz turned his back toward the flat-chested girl, and his shoulders were shaking uncontrollably.

Don't I look like a man that has no other options and has truly been pushed to his wit's end? – Stupid, this whole thing was unbelievably stupid.

This duel was instigated by Barter challenging Nilvalen.

He adopted a close-one-eye attitude towards Nilvalen's schemes in attempting to free the slaves and used it as a condition for the game to force her into accepting unfavorable conditions, and to grasp an even more decisive victory, he even made Fritz help secretly.

But – he recalled a sentence the super busty one (Fii) had said previously…

- I would feel frustrated as well if the victor was decided instantly in that fashion…

(- So essentially speaking, their target from the start was not Barter, but me instead.)

Fritz struggled to hold his laughter in, as he realized that Fii accepting Barter's challenge so easily was also part of the plan.

In a situation where his hands were tied in assisting Barter, even a young Imanity girl could force him into a corner.

That sort of dirty tactic should have been obvious to spot.

Also he himself should have predicted that something like this would happen.

Him smuggling and selling magic potions, and that Fii and Kurami would come into contact with him during the duel, all these things were already notified in advance to him by Barter himself.

Why? Because they had went to discuss the matter with him initially.

- Your butler has been committing such crimes, and you are his master, so as not to damage your reputation, we plan to secretly make him admit to everything by himself, thus we seek your assistance in this matter.

They created this situation, just so he would fall into their trap.

(… That is definitely what they had thought of – It's just too laughable!)

What these two had not realized is that, the person that they had sought assistance from, Barter, was the ringleader of the smuggling ring.

Barter would not sell him out, because as long as Fritz confessed, not only the smuggling pipelines, but even evidence that Barter himself was the ringleader would all be leaked out.

Thus he had pretended to cooperate, and planned to acquire Fii for himself in the process.

Barter himself had come up with the plan, and chose his own mansion as the venue that the entire course of events would take place. Since the premise was that the plan was a secret, other than this flat-chested slave, no others had accompanied them.

- It was too easy.

So the Imanity with the pitiful chest and the busty Elf with the pitiful brains – the two that had attempted to frame him, ended up being trapped in the spider's web instead.

"… You are really unexpectedly stupid, to let even an idiot understand, I shall attempt to explain this again."

The flat-chested girl's voice was like a jet of ice-cold water, sprayed at Fritz who was still trying to control his laughter.

“You have no other options, so do you want to play a game, or have your life ruined? Do you understand?”

Hearing this hilarious challenge, Fritz clenched his teeth and held in the urge to laugh uncontrollably, then raised his head.

His line of sight left the courtyard, and instead he turned to look at his opponent.

Fritz tried his best to act calm, and sat down at a table located at his side.

“… Fine, however I am bored as well, so just end this quickly.”

“What a coincidence, I cannot let this game drag on due to my partner, so let's just play a simple game.”

The flat-chested one sat across from him.

“Here is a perfectly normal deck of cards.” She drew three cards and placed them on the table.

The cards were the Ace, Queen and King of Spades.

“King trumps Queen, Ace trumps King, Queen trumps Ace.”

As she said this she laid the cards face-down again, then shuffled the cards multiple times on the table.

“We will each draw one card in its face-down position, then draw our cards to decide victory. I'm sure even an idiot like you will be able to understand this?”

“-Hmph, so what is your demand?”

“Isn't that what you should be stating? Or do you want to just beg for mercy?”

The flat-chested girl laughed in an insulting manner, and despite feeling angered by her actions, Fritz conceded to her requests just the same.

“… Then I request the destruction and forgetting of the information 「You both」 have acquired regarding the smuggling.”

“Fine, then I request that you 「Confess」 and 「Testify」, and not leave out a single detail.”

Hearing her request presented in a warm tone, Fritz's brow jumped slightly.

Her aim was – for him to confess all the details related to the smuggling, and cheating by interfering in the game currently taking place in the courtyard.

So, these two stupid and pitiful women may be foolish, but they had thought out their own interests before coming here, as if they hadn't fallen into their trap from the start….

“- Fine, 「Acciente」.”

“OK, 「Acciente」 ……”

- Draw.

While maintaining the card he had drawn in a face-down position, Fritz used a tiny bit of magic.

(So you think I cannot assist Barter and use magic at the same time?)

And the opponent was merely the shame of Nilvalen.

Fii Nilvalen – The most incapable existence since the founding of the House of Nilvalen.

Even graduating from school – 「Towering Alabaster Trees」[2] proved to be too difficult a task for her, if not for the runic markings on the back of her hand and her forehead, she wouldn't be able to even Double Cast, being an underachiever; on the other hand, Barter could Triple Cast, and his opponent was a stupid busty woman overconfident with the illusion that it was a false competition, even if he left momentarily, what could go wrong?

- Using the spell known as 「Perspective」, he saw that his card was an 「Ace」.

Sadly he was unable to see through his opponent's trick before the game had started, however this was a game suggested by his opponent, and cheating was to be expected.

He confirmed that he couldn't feel the presence of magic, so the only cheating method a species like Imanity would be capable of is – Did she mess with the deck when she shuffled, to control the card that she would draw?

No matter, the only card that the flat-chest could beat him with – would definitely be a 「Queen」.

The predetermined cards were only three.

Even if he turned his 「Ace」 into a 「King」, as long as the remaining card was flipped open, his cheating would be revealed.

But, if that happened, all he had to do would be to 「Use magic to swap the images on their cards」.

Even if she messed with the deck during shuffling to control which card she would draw, but that action itself would be cheating.

Also, even if Fritz used magic to switch their cards, Imanity like Kurami that cannot detect magic would be unable to prove it.

- She would be thinking something along the lines of this.

(You puny species (Imanity), do not underestimate me.)

He used the bare minimum force required to use his finger to tap the tabletop so it would not produce any sound.

In an instant, the spirits that flowed across the table told him that the flat-chest's card was 「King」.

Essentially speaking, she guessed that her card would be swapped with his – and intentionally picked a card that would lose against him.

"- After all, it is the 「Shame of Nilvalen」 and her slave… How naïve."

Fritz at this point didn't bother concealing it anymore, then burst out laughing.

"A dumb busty woman is better than a smart flat-chested one, women's vitamins rather than being sent to the brain, would be even more of value if they were transported to their chests. However – if one is both dumb and flat-chested, then it's a really incurable case."

"… It appears the rumor that character cannot be developed without having it from birth is true."

The flat-chest wrinkled her forehead in displeasure.

Fritz cleared his throat slightly, as he did not need to do anything besides let his opponent fall into his trap.

"So, can we flip our cards now?"

"Fine, then it will be your loss."

They flipped over their cards simultaneously.

Fritz's card, as expected, was an 「Ace」.

And the flat-chest's card was –

- A 「Queen」.

"… H-How could this be -!? This is impossible!?"

Fritz kicked away his chair and yelled.

How could this be possible? Impossible, it shouldn't be this way – hearing Fritz's howls, a smile appeared on Kurami's face.

- It was a gentle smile. Yes, spreading on her face like the sun.

"… Heh, it was different from the card you peeked at, are you surprised yet?"

- After the pitch of her voice changed, Kurami's body appeared to shimmer.

"Magic, should be used only after you detect who you're using it on, you know!"

The black-haired girl disappeared as though she was a mirage, and instead turned into a girl with a mane of blond hair, which was to say –

“You…. You are Nilvalen!?”

Fii who had previously taken on the image of Kurami, returned to her original form.

“Yes, I am Fii Nilvalen.”

Fii smiled indulgently, with the shape curling up into a sideways half-moon.

“You were saying compared to my brains, my vitamins had all went to my breasts right…? Then I have a question for you, in the case of you, where did your vitamins run off to – the growth of your thing down there doesn't seem that good either.”

In an instant, spirits scrambled over Fritz's body, inspecting the condition of his body, and Fii smiled until both her eyes were but tiny slits.

“Both the top and the bottom are not being used adequately, I really feel sorry for the vitamins that you have absorbed, you know!”

But Fritz did not take particular notice of her insults – He lost? Lost to Nilvalen!?

“You do not need to be this bewildered, hmm? Despite being both small and short "down there", there will definitely be people that will like it… But if your brains and appearance are both lacking, then I really have nothing to say~?”

-Then – t-t-then!?

“… Impossible! Then the one currently dueling against Barter – who is it!?”

Part 4

“Kurami~ I'm already done on my part~”

Fii Nilvalen stretched her body out from the balcony, and waved towards the courtyard.

Instantly – the body of Fii Nilvalen that was currently in a duel against him – no…

The one that was merely imitating her appearance – took off her veil, returning to her normal appearance.

The black-haired and black-clothed girl that appeared in her place – Kurami Zell, took a bow gracefully.

“- Thank you for your cooperation, Sir Barter.”

“… No, no, my servant has been doing illegal things behind my back, I have to take responsibility for not realizing earlier, um.”

Upon seeing the Imanity female that had bowed deeply, Barter hid away his shock, and spoke with a wrinkled brow.

“No, but this is different from what we had agreed on earlier? Hmm? You both agreed with me that this would be carried out in secret… I had not heard that there was another accomplice.”

When she heard Barter's question, the girl exclaimed “Hmm?” and tilted her head in confusion.

“If I may speak, if there were any uninvited intruders in your mansion, you would have detected them before anyone else right?”

“Um, uhm….”

That was the truth, and Barter had nothing to say in return.

The mansion only had him and Fritz, Fii and Kurami, and numerous other helpers in it.

It was his own mansion, as long as there were others inside, he would have detected it, as within the mansion there were numerous spells of this capability.

Not to say that he intentionally utilized this advantage to carry out the duel in this venue, but –

Then how did this female Imanity, carry out the duel with him previously?

The black-haired female chuckled and said:

“According to the deal, only the both of us came.”

“Yes, yes, forgive me for being rude… Then, then this game will be considered null and void, so let's end it now, hmm?”

- Not right, something was not right.

Barter felt a strong sensation of unease, and stood up from his seat.

First things first just void this duel, and quickly plan what needs to be done next–

“Hmm? Sir Barter, did you misunderstand something?”

- Hearing that line that chilled him to the bone, Barter quickly turned around.

The black-haired girl, Kurami, had stood up as well – with an expression of extreme mockery on her face.

“Set two cards down.”

Two cards from the girl's deck disappeared and materialized again on the tabletop.

“I have not agreed – to end the game you know?”

“- What!?”

In a situation where both parties have yet to agree to end the game, the game will not end.

“You, you, what are you trying to do!?”

“To continue the game of course, please return to your seat, if you wish to surrender, then I have no choice but to redeem the reward.”

Hearing the words Kurami spoke, Barter's eyes opened wide.

He had previously thought that he would definitely win, so he didn't pay much attention to her demands.

- “We request that you forget all about our plans, and assist us unconditionally and to any extent.”

Even though the phrasing was somewhat different, but it was of the same severity as his request to Fii – no, even worse.

He would forget even the details of the game, and would become their slave.

In comparison to this: Barter's request was:

- “I request your personal freedom – and you must obey me for the rest of your life.”

In this situation, the person that had agreed to the duel was Kurami, and not Fii.

Even if Barter had won, he would only win an insignificant slave belonging to the Nilvalen family.

He had initially believed that the opponent had agreed to conditions advantageous towards him – but instead he was the one that had accepted disadvantageous terms - !?

“You, you both!?”

“Barter! Your time is almost up, do you wish to surrender?”

In contrast to the emotionally unstable Barter, Kurami asked the question nonchalantly.

- If one party has already picked their cards, and the other does not draw theirs within a given period of time, it would be regarded as the other party's defeat.

Barter remembered this rule, and quickly yelled out:

“- ! Set two cards down!!”

Following Barter's order, two cards disappeared from his deck and materialized on the tabletop.

Kurami smiled with pride.

「Draw」

When the command was uttered, the four cards were simultaneously revealed.

Barter's cards were 「The Moon」 and 「The High Priestess」.

「Within the robes lie Deceit」.

Kurami's cards were 「Justice」 and 「The Emperor」.

「My rule is Absolute」.

As compared to Barter's combination's ability which dispelled the enemy's attack and resisted the opponent, Kurami's combination's ability was to carry out its own will over all others while releasing all possible status effects upon the enemy. The sword drawn by the emperor, revealed the true identity of the high priestess, and relieved her of her position.

Removing the opponent's power and influence, the emperor's strength was then directed towards Barter who appeared to be still in a daze.

"- Ugh!?"

He hurriedly casted a defensive spell.

Just as the emperor's sword was about to connect, three spells activated at once.

But the hurriedly made defensive shield made a cracking noise, and caused scalding damage to Barter's Elemental Gallery as the sword broke through.

After the explosion and blinding light had subsided, a voice spoke behind the panting Barter.

"Oh no! It appears that strike had diminished your stamina by at least half, hmm!"

Turning around, he saw Fii leisurely walking towards him with his dejected-looking butler trailing behind.

"! Fritz – you actually lost to a weakling like Nilvalen!?"

Upon hearing Barter's scolding, Fritz's facial expression twisted slightly, but he remained silent and bent his head downward.

While Fii who was standing beside him spoke with a relaxed smile:

"It was inevitable, wasn't it? He let down his guard because he thought I was an Imanity."

"You shut up, Nilvalen! You bitch, how dare you lie to me!?"

"Sigh~ what do you mean lying, such an ugly word… Because…"

Fii's line of sight shifted towards Kurami who was still sitting at the table.

And Kurami merely nodded her head once, a cold smile appearing on her face.

"- You were the one that had planned to cheat us to gain victory, weren't you."

Barter took a deep breath, and Kurami continued:

"You were the one that ordered your butler to smuggle contraband and earn illegitimate cash – did you really think we wouldn't know?"

"As long as you pretended to cooperate and set a trap for us, you could eliminate the evidence, and gain all the benefits –"

"When the plan fails you call off the game, and refuse to admit anything – you really are a dirty person." [3]

Upon hearing Fii and Kurami's accusations, Barter's facial expression twisted violently.

The plan was a failure from the beginning, they clearly knew his intentions, but instead they used it against him - …No!

"Heh, heh heh… You're still one step behind, Nilvalen."

"Yes? Looking for me?"

Fii opened her eyes wide and tilted her head to the side in confusion while Barter confidently shouted:

"Since I've found out that the one dueling against myself was this little strumpet, then the evidence of you cheating is obvious! Because a normal Imanity would never be able to block the 「Attack」 of the cards, it was you who

helped here, wasn't it!?"

- No mistake there, since the game began, they had already contested three rounds with seven battles between them.

So in forty rounds, Kurami had been targeted by several 「Attacks」.

Barter clearly saw her using magical shields to deflect the attacks.

Since Imanity are unable to use magic, then it was definitely Fii who was helping her – but…

Fii was speechless when faced with these accusations, instead scratching her cheek and replying with a chuckle:

"The person who had instructed his butler to do the exact same thing, shouldn't have the right to say anything, right~…"

Kurami continued:

"Also that wasn't even considered cheating – you fool."

Faced with a direct accusation, Barter was momentarily stunned.

"How about you take a moment to chew on the pledges regarding the game – when I confirmed the conditions, I clearly said 「We」."

- At this point, Barter really opened his eyes wide, unable to think of a reply.

Since the opponent had stated 「We」, then the game would be considered as a duel between Barter and a tag team consisting of Fii and Kurami. The rules did not restrict leaving the area during the course of the game, so even if Fii was casting defensive barriers at a distance, it wouldn't be considered as breaking the rules – no, wait, before that.

(She changed their appearances so as not to let us find out, and was simultaneously playing a game on the second floor while casting defensive barriers -?)

Kurami sighed and frowned slightly.

"… Fii, it appears this moron has finally realized it."

"Since he has an unfair disadvantage of blood overly concentrated in his posterior area and not being transported to his brain, we can forgive him for now right?"

Fii said that while chuckling, but her voice sounded chilling enough to cut through bone.

"He fell for it even when using such a simple word game, how disappointing. I had even prepared much more complicated back-up plans, strategies and traps – for no purpose since they're all unnecessary now anyway."

The underachieving girl standing in front of him sighed as though she couldn't take it anymore.

"Just a quick mention… Your cards were too easy to guess, initially you would definitely take the offensive, and use a curse combination if the attack were to be blocked. Since you don't like countering, you wouldn't use it, and the combination just now was just a result of your panic, to survive the round, you attempted to use cards to 「Prevent Attack」, even an idiot could – sorry, if it was so, it would be normal if you couldn't guess that."

Barter's shoulders were shaking uncontrollably due to anger, shame – and a pang of fear that was almost painful to admit.

In the forty rounds of cards, Kurami only suffered very few 「Attacks」.

And that was only in the early phases where luck played a much bigger role, in the later rounds – all his cards were seen through by her.

This was not the doing of an Elf, but a puny species (Imanity) had managed to –

"- Don't underestimate Imanity, you useless old man."

This unpredictable black-haired girl….

"…OK – Let's continue the game!"

… She said it with a laugh as though from a god of death.

--…….

Sharp and fast-flowing spirits bound Barter's arms – disrupting the nerve systems within his Elemental Gallery.

A pain too exquisite to describe, made the centuries-old man, cry like a baby,

After the blow sufficient to scatter all the flowers growing in the courtyard had subsided – The Elven old man had fallen from his chair, writhing in pain, while the young Imanity girl whispered to him gently:

"– This concludes the fourth round, what do you plan to do from here? Sir Barter."

"Eh, eh"

"Also, you should have noticed by now, Fii… my master (Fii Nilvalen) – is a 「Hex Caster」."

When he heard that whisper, the old man's skin turned whiter than a piece of paper.

He knew that it was not a bluff.

Because if it were untrue, it would be impossible to explain the various things Fii was capable of doing.

Kurami crouched down, as though to console the pale, shuddering old man and continued:

"No problem, even though you look as if you have no remaining energy to cast defensive barriers – you still have a good chance of winning, as long as you are able to predict all my following cards and finish me without taking a single hit, draining the power of the Hex Caster in the process."

- After stating the one-in-a-trillion chance, Kurami laughed.

"There's no problem even if you lose, it will only hurt a little – you'll only die if you're not careful."

- Yes, the exact feats entailed in that were – what Kurami had pulled off just minutes earlier.

Even a puny species could do it, so it shouldn't be too hard for an Elf–

"I su- I surrender! I've lost! So please, stop the game!"

"-OK, so it's our victory then. It's been hard on you, Sir Barter."

Kurami ignored the pitiful old man, stood up from her seat while Fii embraced her with a cheer.

"You are amazing!! An Imanity besting over an Elf in this game, it must be the first time huh?!"

"… Beating this old fool has nothing deserved to be praised so much about, after all, he was the weakest among all our recent opponents."

Fii looked as if she was comforting the unhappy Kurami, stroking her hair gently, then turned around.

"Now –"

Fixating her eyes upon the still-prone Barter and Fritz who was still standing motionless in shock.

"So Sir Barter, please adhere to the pledges, and forget everything related to our business."

And then – Kurami spoke with a large smile on her face.

"Continue your illegal smuggling and vending as per normal."

-Wait… What?!

"And then, Mr. Fritz! You will 「Confess everything」 in – half a month's time."

- What is going on?

While Barter and Fritz were still in the midst of their confusion, Kurami walked closer to the table.

"Now we should be taking our leave. But, before that –"

She lifted up the deck of tarot cards used in their game, and shuffled them while smiling.

"I will predict your futures as a gift."

"Eh? Kurami, you actually know how to do this? It's the first time I'm hearing of it."

"Yeah, because it's the first time I'm trying it today, but – these futures will definitely come true."

Kurami said that jokingly but yet somehow sinisterly, and began shuffling the cards –

“Oh, some interesting cards have appeared, um – let me take a look?”

After she said that, she flipped open the four cards one by one.

-「Temperance」.

“After today, you will successfully continue your potion smuggling and vending business with the Dwarves.”

-「The Tower」.

“But half a month later… Oh no, this is terrible, the Dwarves doing business with you will confess「For some reason」.”

-「The Wheel of Fortune」.

“Also「Very coincidentally」, the butler will be found implicated in the affair, your evil doings discovered one by one… Then –“

-「Judgment」.

“Sir Barter will be brought to justice by the government – story ends, please restrain your grief.”

Ignoring the two pale-faced men, Kurami spoke to Fii as though acting in a play:

“Heh, interesting isn't it, Fii. If Sir Barter is arrested, I wonder who will assume position of head of his company that so happens to be the top trading company of Elven Gard, Will Andomoro (ウィルアンドモロ)?

“Oh, coincidentally it happens to be the young master of the Enrihl (エンリヒ) family whom we「Played with」just three days ago.”

- All this, was in their control. When he saw their sinister and yet all-knowing smiles, Barter furiously roared:

“Nilvalen, you – no, what are you both planning!?”

Both replied with chilly smiles:

“Eh? It's OK if we tell you actually~”

“You'll forget everything anyway, which of course includes this meeting we had.”

Barter couldn't help but shudder upon seeing the innocent smiles on the faces of the two demonic women.

- What kind of monster have I provoked?

“OK, now just like we swore on the pledges – Goodbye, Sir Barter.”

“I will pray for your sake, hope your business thrives from here on out~”

- Just like that.

With a snap, as Kurami and Fii snapped their fingers…

All their memories regarding the events that happened on that day, vanished without a trace.

Part 5

Kurami and Fii pulled down their identical veils to mask their faces.

Both of them were not there, and were never there.

That was the way things worked.

Carefully avoiding the detection of the eyes and ears of others, both of them leaped from the top of Sir Barter's mansion.

The spell conjured by Fii caught them mid-air with a force greater than gravity, lifting them both gently up and into the air.

- They overcame air resistance, and flew through the night sky.

Only the red moon, the starlight, and the light of the city were left, illuminating the surrounding landscapes.

This was the city within the forest, a green metropolis woven through utterly and completely trained magic. It was a sight Kurami was used to seeing – but even for those seeing it for the first time, and obvious despite the faint light, Elven Gard's different castes of civilization could be observed – the duo's hoods billowed in the wind as they cruised through the skies above the city.

"Kurami was perfect just now~"

From the trees – no, from one building to another, as if hopping from roof to roof, Fii said:

"You had to defeat that useless old thing without any help from me, I was really worried you know."

"… Let's drop the subject, Fii, are you OK?"

"Hey, it's not a bad feeling to have Kurami worried once in a while, you've really grown~"

Fii maintained the spell that allowed them to continue floating in the air while replying with a mischievous grin on her face.

But even in the faint lighting, Kurami could clearly see that the gemstone on Fii's forehead had lost its usual glimmer and was now dark due to overuse of magic.

Sir Barter and his butler Fritz…

They were 「Triple Casters」 and 「Double Casters」 respectively, although they were not yet considered top-ranked, they were still exceptional mages.

But… Kurami glanced at the girl cruising through the night sky beside her, and was immersed in thought. - Fii Nilvalen.

Kurami was serving her master as a slave, head of one of the very few highly prestigious families in Elven Gard.

Due to poor results, she was expelled from the most prestigious magical learning institutions in the land - 「Tree of White」.

She drew white runic markings upon herself and wore a support gemstone used by beginners, while those not in the know mocked her and labelled her as the most incapable existence since the founding of the House of Nilvalen – calling her 「Scrap metal」.

But, those who knew better (Kurami) merely snorted at the insults, and thought of her as the most talented existence since the founding of the House of Nilvalen – as though she were a precious ingot of 「Gold」.

Fii had never intentionally revealed her true strength to Kurami.

However –

She had cast magic on herself and Kurami to disguise themselves, and in order not to let Barter and Fritz realize, she had also cast more spells on them to prevent them from being recognized, even placing 「Defenses」 on Kurami from a long distance during the game of Magical Tarot Cards, all while dueling Fritz… She had casted six spells at once.

「Hex Caster」 - She was undoubtedly beyond the level of a talented mage.

No, previously in their game with Sora and others – the game of Reversi that was only made possible through the usage of Jibril's core.

The Flugel, ranked sixth, possess astronomical power, and Fii could actually conjure up a spell strong enough to deflect one of their attacks.

Based on this fact, it is easy to imagine that the words "incredibly talented" wouldn't even be enough to describe the sheer talent Fii possessed.

Considering that she is in such a high caliber, even the school that had expelled her, might recruit her as a professor.

… She should at least be enjoying that sort of treatment.

"Hmm…? Is something wrong? Kurami?"

Her golden hair billowing in the night air, her skin white as snow even in the darkest night, and her smile was even more illuminating and attractive than the sun.

Fii Nilvalen, not only born to a normal family but also possesses abnormal intelligence and adept magical ability.

What should be waiting for her would be a bright and hopeful future – if she had not given it all up herself.

Yes, she had rejected a fantastic future that was within her grasp.

She had hidden her actual potential and portrayed herself as a useless person, even choosing to defy her hometown, country and even her race.

She did all that not for anyone else, but only for the sake of one person –

"- …Nothing."

Only for her best friend.

Kurami silently bent her head down and exhaled loudly.

Choosing to call a mere slave and Imanity (herself) her best friend, and oppose the rest of the world.

Slave liberation – how nice it sounds indeed.

However, that would be equal to releasing Elven Gard's national secrets. For if they attempted to free the Fairies and such, who are being harnessed for their advanced magic, it would be akin to selling out their country's secret weapons to other countries.

If things got to that stage, the Dwarves - Hagenfell would not miss such a great opportunity.

Elven Gard would probably lose a continental territory that has been contested for nearly a thousand years due to a land dispute.

Even worse, the country would fall apart, and the inevitable fate if that happened – would be obvious enough not to mention it.

- As long as it was for Kurami, it didn't matter even if her hometown were destroyed.

She swore it, and she genuinely meant it. To be honest, she had already made several very dangerous moves.

For Fii to be like that, Kurami had only gratitude, and a feeling akin to yearning that seemed to transcend race and age.

- But Kurami couldn't help wondering, what about herself?

Even if it didn't show on her face, Fii's soul gem showed that she was exhausted.

She couldn't even win a game without relying on such a remarkable person to bear such a heavy burden.

Whether or not she was worthy of being the 「 Best friend」 of someone like Fii –

- Suddenly she felt a bolt of pain shoot through her head.

Old memories flashed past, and Kurami stopped in mid-air while holding one hand to her head.

- A pinky swear with a young girl, and a puppet that desired to become a human.

Had he – the puppet – Sora ever thought that he would serve as shackles to bind the young girl?

The girl had the ability to cruise the broad skies alone, but he instead became a burden that tied her down to the ground –

"Eh… Kurami, is there something wrong?"

Her best friend noticed that she stopped and turned around for her, while Kurami looked down and replied:

"… Fii, sorry. If I could do better…"

"Kurami…?"

Elven Gard, with overwhelming affinity for magic as its weapon, a superpower that controlled nearly 30% of total landmass.

Its national power was over twice the size of the country of the Dwarves, Hagenfell, the country that was ranked after the Elves, taking the position of the largest country in the world.

Its foundation was as sturdy as a castle, just finding one opening in its defenses was harder than attempting to reach beyond the heavens -

… No, that was merely an excuse.

The images of two people flashed across her mind, and Kurami clenched her fists even tighter.

"This time, if it had been 「Those two」 - then magic shouldn't even be necessary."

"Kurami."

Removing the high-ranking officials controlling transport, trade and welfare step-by-step, secretly shaving off their power, that would only create an opening smaller than a needle, as though an ant's nest.

But if this continued how long would they have to wait until–

"Not only that, they should be able to win even more!"

After many smaller games have been played, the loopholes will gradually increase.

If the higher powers were to detect their activities, their existences would be wiped out in an instant.

What they needed was a move like Sora had used in the game of chess - 「Using an unexpected strike to end the game in one move」.

"But… all I'm doing is being a burden to Fii, and I haven't improved a single bit–"

"Kurami!"

Kurami's clenched nails were almost piercing through her skin, but a calm yet powerful voice stopped her just in time.

"Kurami can't possibly become 「Those two」."

"…. Yeah, I get it."

Kurami looked down dejectedly. She knew, even if she imitated Sora, it would have no meaning.

Sora and Shiro would only be 「」 when they were together – would only be Imanity's strongest gamers.

She needed to find a method suitable for herself–

"No, you don't understand at all, you know!"

Kurami who had her thoughts interrupted looked up.

"I don't know what kind of memories Kurami received from Sora-san, but what kind of person Sora-san is – I believe I have at least a slight understanding."

In the hypnotic glow of the forest city, Fii said seriously.

"Sora-san had calculated that they couldn't do it themselves, which is why they chose Kurami instead!"

"… Yes, but considering I'm like this–"

"Also, they had calculated that Kurami alone can't do it, so they sent me as well!"

"--!"

"Both us and them are two as one, and don't even think about not borrowing my power in order to win games, that would be like trying to do alone what Sora-san and Shiro-san do together you know!"

"…Fii."

"Kurami can borrow my power you know, it makes perfect sense."

They are a team of two, we are a team of two as well.

If the result is the same, then there would be no need to feel shameful – but…

"But I've always been a burden to Fii, and not–"

"It's only because Kurami is around that I can do my best… and–"

Fii grasped the hand of Kurami who was still looking downward, then said while smiling:

"I know, of course! Kurami has been looking through Sora-san's memories daily, digging up all of Sora-san and Shiro-san's strategies and tactics, wanting to make them your own–"

Her expression changed, and her eyes revealed an expression of worry.

"Because of that, you haven't slept for a long while, haven't you?"

"……!"

"If Kurami doesn't sleep, then I won't sleep as well. If Kurami does her best, I will do my best. If you think I am very tired–then of course Kurami yourself must be very tired as well!"

Fii said while looking into Kurami's eyes.

- Rubbing at heavy eyebags that couldn't even be shielded by the night sky, speaking gently as though a mother lecturing her child:

"Kurami, if you're worried that I'll stress myself out, then I want you to promise me, tonight you have to sleep well… At this rate, 「Both of us」 will collapse together, you know…"

"… Sorry, I've worried you so…"

"Hmph, of course not."

Fii intentionally puffed up her cheeks.

"At this point there should be other things to say right?"

"… - Yeah, thank you, Fii."

Fii smiled and nodded her head, took Kurami by the hand then recast the spell to lift them into the air.

"Also, I think the reason why Sora-san gave us the mission in Elven Gard, wasn't for a particularly serious reason… am I wrong to say this?"

Both of them recalled the face of that man–imagined his bored expression, then simultaneously exclaimed:

"'Politics and power and whatnot, all that crap like dividing up a country is way too troublesome, so I'll just leave you two to it.'"

The duo laughed bitterly, then soared higher up into the night sky.

Part 6

At the roadside hotel where both of them were spending the night, two beds were placed in a small room.

Fii that had removed her hood and put on her pajamas, repeated again as though lecturing:

"So Kurami, you must get a good sleep tonight, OK?"

"…Then, may I request something?"

"What is it? Just say it, I won't mind."

Kurami hugged her pillow while awkwardly shifting her gaze.

"U-um… Co-could you sleep with me tonight?"

Upon seeing Fii's satisfied smile, Kurami whose face had turned red yelled:

"It, it's not like that! I couldn't sleep because I kept dreaming of Sora's memories! So, so what I wanted to say was, like how Sora holds Shiro–just holding Fii's hand will make me feel better… All this is Sora's fault, OK?!"

"Fine, fine, it's all Sora-san's fault, so don't be shy. Just like before, if you have a scary dream, there's no need to be courteous, just burrow into my side of the bed, hmm?"

"I've already said it's not like that, right!? Ugh, this is all Sora's fault, why do I have to deal with such things–"

Despite her constant swearing, she still got into bed under Fii's constant persuasion.

Just like that, Kurami lay on the bed with her back towards Fii, while Fii laughed and said:

"Kurami, is there anything else you want me to do for you? Like singing a lullaby, for example!"

"I just want you to stop teasing me and let me sleep."

"Really? Don't you want me to pet your head or hug you?"

"……. If Fii wants to do it, I have no objections."

"Yay~! Of course I want to do it, so let me pet your head for a bit, hmm!"

The touch of Fii's hand made Kurami's body gradually relax.

Kurami recalled previously when things happened – when she cried, Fii would stroke her hair like this as well.

As a slave, being brought up at the Nilvalen household.

Despite Fii always standing by her side – there were a lot of painful memories, memories that made her cry, make her feel like dying, but she always told herself, she couldn't immerse herself in self-pity. Kurami frantically resisted the flow of tears until she was safely inside the covers of her blanket – those times seemed so far away.

Now after coming into contact with Sora's memories… Now when she was no longer the one crying –

"Kurami…are you asleep?"

Fii softly asked – with a volume soft enough so as not to wake her up if she was actually sleeping.

And it was Fii's voice that prevented Sora's memories from once again resurrecting and keeping her awake.

"…Not yet, what is it?"

"Hmm~ if you can't sleep, before you do, could you chat with me for a while?"

"Of course, what do you want to talk about?"

Her casual words were at the same time spoken with a serious tone, and Kurami curiously nodded her head, signaling Fii to go on.

"Kurami appears to completely trust Sora-san."

After which Fii worriedly continued:

"Honestly, this makes me worried…"

"….."

"The memories that Sora-san passed onto you, are they his real memories?"

- Sora had a Flugel by his side, so memory editing could definitely be done through the power of the pledges.

Would he create fake memories and hand them over to Kurami just so he could control her?

What Fii implied was this, but…

"It's true that I may have been cheated, that is something Sora would do…"

Kurami smiled bitterly and continued.

"- Or at least, that's what everyone seems to think."

Seeing Fii tilt her head in shock, Kurami chuckled slightly.

"You should relax, the one that「Thinks too highly of」Sora – is not me, but Fii."

- A piece of his memories flashed through Kurami's head.

Sora's memories generally made others discomforted – but the one just now was –

"Fii… do you know why the term 「Genius」 exists?"

"…Eh?"

"It's to make others admit that they are different from other humans. Puppets refer to the people they do not understand as geniuses, those who are praised are known as geniuses, while the reverse would be labelled as monsters; and to most of them – it is an insult."

- Because they are different life forms from us, so not being able to compare ourselves with them isn't very surprising either.

Most people would admit this, then give up – but that puppet was different.

"Yes, he was really just a puppet."

- He was merely normal (an idiot).

"But he refused to be just a puppet."

- A genius that yearns for what lies before him (the real thing).

"So – he experienced things that makes one question how he still managed to remain standing."

Thus, Kurami in a state of being half-asleep and half-awake, traversed through Sora's memories.

To invent something that would allow something that was bound to the ground to fly – how would one test whether the invention had worked or not?

The answer would just be to try flying – to verify whether or not one would crash, no matter how many times one crashed, even if your body and soul were smashed to bits –

"… He would still stand up, cheerfully, and pretended as though nothing had happened."

Bleeding inside, clenching his teeth, he looked at his sister, then stood up again.

Any characteristic we would typically expect in a genius did not exist in him at all.

- It's true, having a capable sister really is hard, Onii-chan.

"Sora – is extremely stubborn, so you could catch up to him – no, even surpass him without any problem. He's just at a level that's definitely attainable, as long as you are 「Human」. Just as he claims, he's just an idiot. Although he's an idiot, he's also the real thing, constantly pursuing what he yearns for, constantly struggling - a normal… idiot."

… As she said this, Fii's hand was still gently stroking her head.

Kurami's consciousness was also gradually fading.

"What he needs is just a little bit of – but to truly understand it is – a truth hard to comprehend…"

As she was falling asleep, Kurami recalled what Sora had said during the King selection games in Elkia.

- When it comes to contests and brutal fights to the death, we are veterans way more experienced than you…

This line spoken by Sora seemed to overlap with one of his past memories –

- Emptily gazing down at both of his hands that were covered in fresh blood…

Merely wanting to be human –

A puppet's memories – "…Really…too stupid…can't even… tell a lie…"

"Kurami?"

… What replied to her call was merely the breathing of someone in a deep sleep.

Still fondling Kurami who was muttering to herself in dreamland, Fii began to think.

And, another thing – she gazed up at the ceiling, thinking about Kurami's unfinished sentence.

Fii remembered the face of the stupid man who according to Kurami was unable to even tell a lie.

- Remembered the face of the man whose existence itself could almost be substituted for the word "lie".

The face that was always cocky and smiling, that made you go on full alert at first sight of him –

"-Ah…"

At that time, Fii's thoughts had finally run their course.

"So that's how it is… 「The liar that can't lie」 …So it's something like this, hmm…"

The things that man had experienced, was enough for Kurami to think that he had lived a tragic life, that sort of man

-

Why – would he want others to feel apprehensive towards him?

The unease that Fii had been feeling for a long time suddenly disappeared. The answer – the future that Fii, Kurami, Sora and others had all been fantasizing about.

As her thoughts led her to reach a point of ecstasy, a small smile gradually appeared on her face.

Immediately, a wave of sleepiness that she had not felt in a long while came over her, and she closed her eyes.

- I can't wait.

Carrying these feelings within herself, she had for a really, really long time – for an unclear amount of years, even, not fell into such a deep sleep.

Chapter 1: Try

Part 1

"Waaaaaahhhhhh!!"

- The capital of the Elchean Federation, Elchea

The last fortress of the Imanity - The lowest-ranked among the 「Sixteen Races」

Until a mere few months earlier, it was a country on the brink of extinction, being forced down to its last city.

However now it had annexed the large maritime country, the 「Eastern Union」, and was expanding its territory at a speed never-before-seen.

A sharp, loud scream of agony came from the capital of a nation that was slowly turning from a 「Nation」 to a 「Federation」.

- In an instant.

The workers within the city that were extremely busy froze for a moment as though time had stopped completely, but it was only for an instant, and they soon resumed their work, seemingly as if nothing had ever happened.

Yep – it was a normal occurrence, and everyone there was used to it.

Everyone knew that 「That person」 was probably yelling again.

And the reason why that person was causing a commotion was probably due to a reason as normal as it could get.

Sometimes a sympathetic atmosphere would billow over the entire city, although everyone still had to return to their own workstations afterward.

"Argh!! Are you an idiot? You're an idiot! You are an idiot, right!?"

The red-haired girl skilfully reconstructed her sentence thrice, and yelled again.

- Stephanie Dora, commonly known as Steph.

She was the head of the Dora family, possessing the title of a duchess, and she was the granddaughter of the late king as well, being a blue blood princess.

She would definitely be a ladylike woman with incredible potential in the future – however those features weren't present at all at that moment, and she had absolutely no way to explain away the situation she was in.

She sat on a chair, scratching her head furiously, looked up and roared loudly.

"…Who's an idiot, des?"

This query was raised by the Werebeast that was sitting cross-legged on the floor beside Steph – Hatsuse Izuna.

Her age appeared to be in the single-digit range, being a young yukata-wearing girl with huge fox-like ears and a bushy tail.

The book in her hand was upside-down, however Steph didn't bother correcting her.

"I mean Sora and Shiro, no, it's me!! What did I say – leave it to me – argh!! Am I an idiot? I'm an idiot!!"

She continued yelling with her arms spread wide.

"Find the real reason why the Seirens Empress is hibernating from the library of the late king!! Leave it to me!! Isn't this what an idiot would say!? How many books do you think there are here!? And, what I want to say is!"

She stopped for a count, and surveyed the bookshelves that covered all the surrounding walls.

"Why and how would I accept a task like searching for a book which existence is unclear so easily!!"

They were in the secret room of the late king – his secret library.

The late king had played the role of a foolish king in order to research and find out the contents of the games of other nations which involve magic or supernatural abilities, as well as how the Imanity themselves could triumph over them.

The records that he had spent his life on – the inheritance of this great man, was all displayed in this room, covering the walls around them.

His great work was compiled in over a thousand books, completely filling up the library.

Even though they were already arranged according to the date written – there was yet to be any hint of when the late king had approached the Seirens, so they could only inspect them one by one. Steph let out an anguished cry upon realizing that was the task they had to undergo, which was – what had happened earlier.

And the worst part was –

Steph pointed towards Izuna with a pained expression on her face but no tears to fully express it – the Werebeast who was holding a book upside-down.

"What the heck does Sora think Izuna can do? She can't even understand Imanity!!"

"Steph-kou, you're really loud, des. Doesn't it look like I'm learning now, des." [4] - What?

"C-could you please wait? What did you call me just now?"

"…? Grandpa said that Steph is a duchess before, des."

"Why did you have to shorten it!? It makes me feel extremely insulted!" [5]

"…Why, des? Steph-kou."

Izuna looked over at Steph with her head tilted.

"Ah, aaaaahhhhh, don't insult me with your round, ignorant eyes!? If I open the door to a new world by accident while sleep deprived, how are you going to make it up to me!?"

Steph banged her head against the corner of a table in frustration, however Izuna replied coldly:

"Steph-kou, stop it, let's get to work, des. Grandpa is still waiting for us, des."

"…Guh…y-you're right, there's no use lamenting like this."

Yes, her grandfather – Hatsuse Ino was being held hostage by the Seirens.

Izuna was tired as well, but even she was trying her best to learn the Imanity language, so Steph had no right to complain – Steph took a deep breath in an attempt to calm herself down.

After which she corrected Izuna.

"Speaking of which, Izuna…that book's upside down."

"…! I-I knew that, des. I-it was on purpose, of course. Des!?"

Izuna hurriedly flipped her book right side up, while Steph continued to correct her.

"Also, even if you really didn't mess up it's fine, but the Imanity language is different from the Werebeast language, it's read horizontally!"

"-? There's a difference between reading horizontally and vertically, des?"

Izuna widened her eyes with a curious expression on her face.

"…Izuna, I've never asked you before, but how old are you?"

Izuna began counting off numbers from her fingers slowly after hearing the question.

She replied with an unconfident question:

"I…I'm supposed to start counting from zero, right?"

- Steph instantly understood.

It was completely reasonable that Izuna would be so close to Sora and Shiro, because they were essentially the same kind of people.

They were geniuses at video games, however they knew nothing else other than that.

Steph sighed and passed her another book.

"…Izuna, you should start from this one."

"What kind of book is this, des?"

"It's a book that I used while I was still studying to learn the Werebeast language, it's in a game format between the two countries –"

"Oh, I understand, des."

Upon hearing the word game, Izuna immediately snatched the book from her and began flipping through it at a furious pace.

Steph approved of her newfound motivation, and knew she was actually trying her best.

But if she read that fast she probably wouldn't understand anything – Steph looked up at the ceiling and let out a long sigh.

"A…anyway I need to search one by one –"

Just as Steph was undergoing her solemn revelation…

Grumble~~~~

She heard a noise and voice that made her revelation instantly dissipate.

"-Steph-kou, I'm hungry, des. Bring food, des."

As though a switch within her had been flicked, Izuna spoke suddenly to Steph and closed her book with a loud smack.

She was motivated, energetic, and wanted to save her grandpa.

But despite that, she actually said – bring food.

Izuna requested that with her huge round eyes that didn't carry any malicious intent.

The young female Werebeast scratched her large ears with her feet while continuously waving her bushy tail from left to right.

Steph was forced to make a decision upon seeing her unbelievably cute appearance.

One, forget everything and just collapse.

Two, make food for this inexplicably cute creature.

After struggling with herself for some time – her sleepiness finally succumbed to Izuna's cuteness.

"A-alright… you can't do anything with an empty stomach anyway… I'll just make something simple to eat with the ingredients I have at hand."

"Mm, I really want to eat fish, but I'll restrain myself, you are forgiven, des."

Just like that, Steph dragged herself slowly out of the library.

…Coming back to the main topic, you all still remember that this is Elchea, right?

At that time Steph could have just collapsed without a care in the world and leave Izuna's meals to the chefs in the kitchen, however she had completely forgot about this selection. Steph lifelessly trudged out of the library, while Izuna followed her with her tail still waggling, and no-one bothered to remind them about it.

Part 2

Let's switch the scene – to twenty thousand meters in the air.

Sora began thinking at an altitude almost three times as high up as the Himalayas.

How should he describe the scenery in front of him?

- First, please imagine a Rubik's cube.

Then hand this Rubik's cube that requires a certain level of intelligence over to someone that is pretty far off from that certain level of intelligence.

After being forcibly taken apart by a pair of pliers, the splinters of the Rubik's cube would then be splattered all about the floor.

Now resist the urge to complain, and repeat those previous actions about a thousand more times.

So? Do you get it now?

The scenery was arranged in such a fashion – which was the scenery around Sora.

"Welcome to my hometown located on the back of the Phantasmas, the floating city – Avant Heim."

With her back facing the small mountain of splinters of Rubik's cubes.

Jibril introduced her 「City」 with a sweet smile on her face, while Sora responded dumbly:

"Um, I'm pretty sure that all the cities I know of at least have roads in them."

The scenery around them was knitted and woven with countless gigantic cubes stacked upon each other.

In the eyes of a renowned artist, there would probably be some meaningful theme to it.

However, regretfully, the eighteen-year-old mortal virgin Sora could only describe it with one word.

Which was – chaotic.

"Anyway, Jibril – let me say this about the Flügel."

"… 「Unobstructed spaces」 …are important…"

- Sora and others began working at the same time as Steph and Izuna.

To discover the true conditions to awaken the Empress of the Seirens – so, in order to carry out comparison and evaluation with people that had underwent the same game, they had went to the one place in the world that stored the most information.

Which meant – the city of the Flügel, Avant Heim.

"Ah, Master, don't stray too far away from me, as the air here is somewhat thin."

Sora and Shiro nodded complacently after hearing Jibril's words.

Also Sora had absolutely no idea of how they should proceed from there.

"…Right, if only the Flügel stay here, there isn't a need for public transport services at all…"

In the 「City」 below them, there weren't any doors, windows, nor roads. To be honest, beings that could move about without any form of restriction didn't need those things. Although they could understand that, the fact that the entire place was constructed with huge, countless cubes denied people any sense of perspective, and since they had nothing to compare the place to they couldn't gauge how exactly big it was.

"…It's not like a city…it's more like a jigsaw puzzle…"

Shiro expressed her easily understandable thoughts, after which she mumbled while looking up:

"…The sky is…blue?"

At twenty thousand meters up the place should be at the doors of outer space, so they shouldn't be able to see blue skies at all…

"Avant Heim is a Phantasma ranked second among the 「Sixteen Races」. This race is ranked even higher than the race that is the source of the Elemental Galleries in this world – the Elementals, and they are organisms completely independent from all normal forms of reproduction. To put it simply… Avant Heim is another world entirely, that's all you need to know."

Even though the air in the atmosphere didn't seem to be enough for her Masters – Jibril still continued to explain.

""Hmm…I see – I don't get it.""

Sora and Shiro nodded as one with the same focused expression.

"No matter the Flügel or the Phantasma, you lot completely refuse to work along terms comprehensible by others, and that for some reason makes us feel relaxed."

After a line of sarcasm, Sora looked towards the horizon, and saw something under a particularly tall tree – could it be that his eyes were deceiving him… probably not, there was something underneath that appeared to be a dragon skull, and it was decorated lavishly and carefully as well, then left there in the open just like that –

"…Jibril, I don't understand the art direction of this city at all."

"What!? This place will eventually be the throne of the Masters, to think that you'd actually dislike it, it really makes me disappointed…"

Hearing Sora's grumbling, Jibril replied somewhat dispiritedly.

"Speaking of which, you should probably save this girl right?"

Sora spoke while pointing towards –

"Aaaaahhhh, the sun! The sun! I'm going to melt! I'm going to melt, burn and evaporate!"

Plum was crouching down with her body scrunched up into a ball and her hood covering her face while crying continuously.

"Ah, I'm sorry… I completely forgot about you, are you still alive?"

"I'll be dead in a few seconds! My power is decreasing drastically!!"

For a Dhampir like Plum the sunlight was fatal to them; and she appeared to be barely fending off the sunlight with her magic, but that magic itself seemed to be siphoning off even more of her energy.

"That's it, Jibril, it's not good to keep Izuna and Steph waiting, so just fly us over to the place where all the information is concentrated. Also, for Plum, it would be best if it's indoors –"

"OK, so please grasp my arms, and then –"

She appeared somewhat nervous – but yet her expression was simultaneously unreadable as well, and she grasped onto Sora and Shiro's arms and spoke:

"…Masters, I understand that it's extremely rude for me to raise such requests – but could you please agree to two requests of mine?"

"…What is it, it's rare that you're this serious."

"- Please don't be disappointed, and please believe."

…Sora didn't understand her at all.

And Jibril merely spoke this one sentence, then shouted: "That thing over there."

"Y-yes!?"

Plum who was referred to as "That thing over there", replied with only her eyes showing themselves from beneath her hood.

"I don't mind leaving you behind here – so could you please hurry up?"

"Ah, I'll be there right this instant, don't leave me –"

Plum hurriedly stood up and dashed over, and in the instant she grabbed onto Jibril – the scenery changed as well.

Part 3

There – it was probably within one of the cubes they had saw from a distance earlier.

The place they were in was even more solemn and immense than the Elchean National Library Jibril had hogged for herself – it was a humongous library.

The high-perched ceilings appeared to stretch up to ten stories high, and the interior was designed like an ancient ruin, with stone-made pillars and stairs, intersecting corridors and curved walkways with intertwining vines growing all over them.

And – those things that looked like 「Pillars」 were actually bookshelves.

On the other hand, there was random memorabilia scattered around the entire place as well, and stairs and walkways arranged in impossible fashions like a surrealist M. C. Escher painting were all over the place – and what lit them up was, gigantic fixtures of painted glass that were definitely not on any walls, as well as infinite amounts of floating lanterns.

It was a dream-like yet elegant place – but it was a blasphemous library completely incomprehensible to the likes of the Imanity.

But leaving that aside for now, Sora spoke while pointing up at something:

"…Jibril, that was probably your doing, right?"

It was probably the effect of the large amount of air that Jibril had transported for the sake of Sora and the others.

The library (of sorts) appeared to be ravaged by strong winds, and large amounts of books were dancing about in mid-air in spiral patterns.

However Jibril looked over at that with a smile on her face and spoke:

"Don't worry about it, Masters, the owner of this place is the creator of the 《Book Equality Law》."

Sora looked up at the dancing books, and remembered why Jibril had took over the Elchean National Library – or rather, the reason why she had left Avant Heim.

Due to the fact that they had collected too many books, the books were overwhelming Avant Heim – and they chose to deal with it by passing the 《Book Equality Law》 in the name of eliminating unnecessary books.

"Her books are the Flügel's books, I am a Flügel, so her books are my books."

Her triple conjugations proved her Takeshi idealism, and she continued with a smile on her face: [6]

"Even if this small accident here was caused by me – or was it on purpose? I believe that she has to consider all these factors before she can 「Decide」, but of course she is extremely kind and tolerant, being able to forgive my mistakes, of course. Even if there are books within the stash there that cannot be copied, reproduced and are the only remaining copies in this world, that's how it is ♥"

So she could only damage those books because she owned them as well.

- Speaking of which, regarding the 《 Book Equality Law》 from earlier, Jibril really couldn't forgive its existence.

After which –

"Aaaaaahhh~! The books! All the books I haven't finished~~~~!!"

Everyone looked towards the source of this outcry.

While the one standing there was –

"…Whoa…"

Even Shiro couldn't help but cry out in awe, and the person standing there was – an extraordinarily beautiful young girl.

The halo spinning around on her head, and the wings stretching out from her waist suggested that she was a Flügel just like Jibril.

However the pattern drawn in the air by her spinning halo was even more complicated than Jibril's.

The largest difference between them was that she had a single horn protruding from her jade-green hair.

Her wings that appeared to be woven from streaks of light flapped in the air, and her appearance as she did so appeared unbelievably sacred.

But her appearance as she was flying about and struggling to collect all the books that were flapping about in the air, as well as her expression that hinted she was about to cry, was completely different from Jibril's icy cold demeanour when they had first met – instead she was extremely cute.

- Phew, phew…

She panted intentionally, then landed beside Jibril and spoke:

"Ugh~ Jii-chan you're mean-nyan~"

A saddened expression appeared on her face which immediately shifted to an angelic smile.

"Is this what I think it is-nyan? Is it those pranks that people play on their loved ones-nyan? Aww~ Jii-chan I haven't seen you in so long~~ nyaaaaa!?"

Jibril brilliantly teleported away in order to dodge her flying lunge towards her.

Upon seeing her crash into a pile of books, Jibril spoke blandly from behind Sora:

"- Masters, I'll introduce her to you, she's the one that approved the dastardly 《 Book Equality Law》 , the head of the 「 Council of the Eighteen Wings」 of Avant Heim, the 「 Full Representative of the Winged」 that has the right to make the final decisions regarding the country's affairs –"

She sighed and continued –

"Azrael-senpai."

- She introduced the motionless girl with half her body buried in books to Sora.

…

"…How should I put this." "The

Flügel…are interesting…"

That girl was the full representative of the race that was ranked in sixth place, brought death with them wherever they went in the past, and used to be god-killing weapons?

Sora and Shiro mumbled to themselves, having had their expectations completely crushed.

- At this time, the young girl that was buried in the pile of books earlier, maybe because she had teleported, she had already hugged Jibril tightly while rubbing her violently with her cheeks over a span of time so short that no-one present had noticed.

“Nyan~ Jii-chan is so mean~ I haven't seen you for so long, but you're still as cold as ever~~~~ but! That's fine too!!”

“Azrael-senpai is as annoying as ever as well.”

Jibril spoke with a smile on her face despite having her cheeks violently jerked about.

- Although Jibril would usually reply sarcastically, this time she outright insulted her, which was rare.

“Nyan~ I've said I'm not your senpai, call me nee-san, neeeeee-saaaaaannnn~~!!”

Azrael flew about in the air, drawing a figure-eight around Jibril.

“Jibril isn't a particularly good case but is it really ok for the full representative of the Flügel to be someone like this?”

“…Nii…you have the right…to say that?”

Shiro looked coldly at Sora, however everyone present ignored that line.

On the other hand, Jibril spoke coldly while being pestered, harassed, and having her cheeks rubbed:

“Azrael-senpai, I gave a request for today, please allow the Masters to browse the library –“

“I refuse-nyan~ unless you call me Nee-san, I'll deny all your requests~ ♪”

Jibril replied in frustration:

“If you explain why you're rubbing my cheeks, and allow the Masters to browse the library, I'll consider it.”

“Because Jii-chan is cute! Explanation over, and I've allowed them-nyan!! Alright, now call me Nee-san ♥ -“

She spoke while lunging towards her, while Jibril teleported away from her outstretched hand.

“So Masters, I've already acquired her permission, please browse this place freely. This is the personal library of the 「Representative of the Winged」, among which countless books have been acquired through the cursed law by taking the books of others, so there's not a single place with more information than here.”

“Y-you're mean!! Jii-chan went back on Nee-san's promise with you-nyan~!?”

Azrael appeared devastated, and her voice was layered with immense shock.

Jibril replied with a flawless smile once again.

“I said that I'd consider it, and after some consideration, I'm not going to ♪”

“Waaaah~ Jii-chan never used to cheat others like this-nyan~ - and whose fault is this-nyan?”

- Glare~~~~

Her tear-filled eyes shot over to Sora.

The power in those eyes appeared as if that gaze alone could kill.

“Nice to meet you, I'm Sora, this is my sister Shiro, please take care of us.”

“…Take care…”

Those two completely ignored her gaze as they were used to it from Jibril.

Upon seeing their reaction, Azrael let out an interested “Oh?”, while Sora pointed at Azrael. “What does she mean by Nee-san? Jibril, you're the sister of the full representative of the Flügel?” “Yes-nyan ♥”

“Nope ♪”

Both of them replied without hesitation – and with truly sisters-like smiles – they replied with completely opposite answers. Jibril sighed and continued:

“The Flügel cannot reproduce, we have no sisters, no brothers and no parents, there is only the order in which we were created.”

“…Ah, so that’s why you call her Senpai.”

Which means, she was a being created even earlier than Jibril.

“Also, Azrael is the 「Representative of the Winged」, not the 「Representative of the Flügel」.”

“…Is there a difference?”

“She’s merely the 「Senator」 of the 「Council of Eighteen Wings」 with nine members, herself included.”

At this mention, Sora recalled what she had said earlier.

He remembered that before Jibril belonged to Sora’s posse, she was a member of the 「Council of Eighteen Wings」.

“Basically she has the first say only when emergencies occur, and another 「Right」 -“

Which meant – Jibril shook her head and smiled bitterly.

“She’s not great nor brilliant, so you don’t need to respect her in any way.”

“…You’re really mean even to your own kind, huh, you really haven’t changed at all…”

Probably because she was unhappy with her response, Azrael puffed up her cheeks in rebuttal.

“That’s not how it is-nyan!! All of us were created by Artosh, so our father is Artosh, and the earliest to be created was me, Nee-san! The last one to be created, Jii-chan, is my imouto! Isn’t this an unspoken fact-nyan!?” [7]

Upon hearing her words, Jibril’s bitter smile turned into one of mockery, and she continued:

“- She raised a suggestion like that during one of the meetings, which was completely rejected by all of the members of the council, that’s how pitiful her intelligence is.”

“Be~cause~ if I don’t do that, Jii-chan won’t ever call me Nee-san~ nyan~!”

“Everyone knows that, which was why they turned it down, unless you’re telling me this is the first time you’re hearing of this?”

Jibril’s tone was as cold as ever, while Azrael hugged her once again and began showing off her little sister with a smile on her face.

“Jii-chan she is~ among the children created in the Great War she is the 「Final Unit」 -nyan♪”

She laughed cheerily, while Jibril on the other hand sighed deeply in frustration.

“The children created in the later stages, since they were created when Artosh-sama was at full power, have a power that is completely indescribable by children like me created during the middle stages of the war-nyan~!! However~ the strong children were all fighting on the front lines – so everyone died in the 「Final battle」 …”

Azrael’s spirits momentarily dipped, and if the person she was hugging happened to be an Imanity, that person would definitely burst like a balloon. She continued while hugging her only surviving sister.

“Jii-chan is the only final-stage unit that survived after the 「Battle」, and she’s the 「Final Unit」 as well-nyan! She’s everybody’s imouto, and what a cute imouto she is-nyan! It should be made a law to call her that, so why doesn’t everyone understand?”

She once again began flying about in figure-eight shapes cheerily.

Jibril squinting her eyes in disgust was a rare sight as well, but –

“…Jibril…to deal with her…disturbing…precious recordings…”

Shiro spoke while lifting up her smartphone, and began taking a video of the angels.

On the other hand, Sora was pondering another question.

He closely observed Azrael's innocent and cheerful smile –

"…This is a pain, at this rate I'll need to change the plan…"

He mumbled to himself disappointedly.

- Glare.

Hearing his softly spoken words, Azrael kept smiling – but then looked towards Sora with a powerful gaze.

"- So, are you the one that snatched my beloved Jii-chan away from us-nyan?"

"Huh, to say a virgin snatched a lover from someone, your question is pretty hard to answer."

Sora replied indignantly, with his head lifted and chest protruding, at the same time appearing dignified, tragic and powerful.

Azrael stepped closer.

"Oh-…."

"…Huh?"

It was impossible to react to that, as it was a step that ignored all boundaries of distance.

The step itself took multiple instants before Sora and Shiro realized what was happening, and they cried out in surprise.

- In that instant.

A silent shock emanated from Jibril's body that caused the library to quake.

Sora had initially suspected that she had used magic, however after hearing what the two said after that –

"…Senpai, if you even so much as touch a hair on my Masters' heads – I'll just say you might want to reconsider it."

"Really now~ Jii-chan you don't need to be so tense~ there are the 「Ten Pledges」 anyway-nyan."

- Sora realized, she had merely unleased a slight bit of 「Malicious intent」.

Just how much did Jibril restrain her power under normal circumstances –

As they got an extremely small glimpse of Jibril's 「True power」, Sora and Shiro felt cold sweat running down their cheeks.

And Azrael didn't seem to mind that 「Slight malicious intent」, instead she turned around to face Sora.

With those jade-green eyes – eyes that were impossibly different from Jibril's – she spoke while glancing at Sora:

"I wish to make something clear."

"- Yeah, what is it?"

- Her gaze this time, was completely incomparable to her gaze from earlier.

A sudden crushing sense of malice filled the room, causing the air in the library to freeze, giving them the impression that the very universe itself was being affected.

If they were to answer incorrectly – they would die immediately.

This world has the 「Ten Pledges」.

Jibril was awaiting their orders by the sidelines.

- Despite this, they were unable to relax.

Azrael's gaze gave them that impression, after which she spoke:

"As long as you command it, Jii-chan will call me 「Nee-chan♥」 right-nyan?"

…

…?

False alarm – no, Sora felt a sinking feeling that gave him the impression that as long as he were to relax, his very soul would escape him.
The very reason why he was barely standing was because Shiro was clutching his hand in fear.

However, Azrael ignored him and continued emotionally.

"E-even like she licked the feet of the E-Elves, she could like mine – or shower with me or something! N-no, I won't force her to do something like that!! For example you could allow me to watch or something –"

- How could she have known that? Sora felt suspicious, however he took out his smartphone from his pocket and replied:
"…If you want videos of Jibril showering, I have videos –"

"I'll bet the Flügel's race piece for that! Give it to me-nyan!!"

- An impossibly loud sound could be heard in that twenty-thousand-foot high altitude.

"Azrael-san, please calm down, you don't have the right to do that. To bet the race piece, you need to consult the decision of the 「Council of Eighteen Wings」 right? I think your request will be unanimously denied once again ♥"

"U-ugh~~…! – Nyan?"

Jibril's tone of voice didn't carry any sense of apprehension despite her adding a small (giggle) at the end of the sentence, however Azrael –

"Wait a second-nyan… noises of gears rumbling are coming from my head! My brain is currently working at light-speeds, it's the most active it's been in my, Azrael's twenty-six-thousand years-nyan!"
- Azrael let slip her incredibly long lifespan just like that while appearing as though considering something.

Finally she raised her head up all of a sudden, seemingly having got an idea.

"- Right-nyan!! You…your name is Sora right!?"

"Ah, yes."

"I'll be your possession as well-nyan! My judgement dictates that if that happens I can shower with Jii-chan!!"

"The worst idea you've had in twenty-six-thousand years, great job on that hard work, Azrael-san."

Jibril smiled a smile that couldn't even be described with the adjective cold, as it carried hints of disappointment as well, and she mocked Azrael.
However – Shiro glanced silently over at her brother.

Azrael had nonchalantly raised her personal freedom as a condition – just as Jibril had said, she wasn't the representative of the Flügel, and so even if they were to acquire her, they wouldn't acquire the Flügel race.
Although it would be no easy feat to play against the Flügel.

Azrael even hinted that she would 「Intentionally lose」, also it would be a rather beneficial decision to have her as an asset.
Also her brother's intention included absorbing the Flügel as well.
On this train of thought, Shiro looked over at her brother as though to confirm her suspicions –

"…?"

She found that Sora had completely lost interest and had calmed down, after which she looked over curiously at Azrael.
Her face still had that enchanting smile on it – an overly perfect smile.

"…Ah…" – understanding what her brother's expression meant, Shiro nodded slightly.

Sora sighed unexpectedly, turned around and walked away.

"…It's rare of you to say such things, but this sort of thing should wait until next time…"

"Eh~~… Jii-chan's naked body –"

Azrael refused to give up, and Sora grasped Shiro's hand and spat.

"…I bragged to Steph earlier that I would acquire three races, but now I'll have to apologize to her."

Looking over at Azrael, Sora – glanced at her with a truly disappointed gaze and said:

"- This one's useless, Jibril alone is fine."

Ignoring Azrael's squinted gaze, Sora and Shiro proceeded to the mountains of bookshelves.

"So Jibril, we can browse the books here right?"

"…Yes, Azrael-senpai has approved of it."

Sora nodded and surveyed his surroundings.

Books, books, books… it was a giant city made up of nothing but books.

And within his line of sight, he could see that on the back of countless books, there was – writing of multiple languages he didn't know.

"Since my original expectations were crushed, it looks like we'll have to tough it out… forget it, let's try our best, Shiro."

"…Mm."

The two agreed and disappeared in the piles of books, while the two Flügel watched them go in silence.

Part 4

Azrael sat cross-legged on one of the piles of books and put her head in her hands.

"Mm~ I wanted to use myself as bait to get Jii-chan, could it be that the bait was too big-nyan?"

She coldly revealed the reason why Sora's expectations were crushed.

No doubt, Azrael's thoughts were completely different from her demeanour, as she didn't believe nor trust Sora.

To get Jibril back, all she wanted them was to fall into her trap.

- As for why Jibril called them her Masters, she had no interest.

"…You really haven't changed, Azrael."

Azrael's expression twitched slightly upon having her name called directly like that, and she replied calmly:

"Jii-chan can even talk back to people such as me and Artosh-sama, so it's impossible that you would serve under mere Imanity-nyan. As long as it's by the pledges, sealing one's intentions or making one a puppet should be easy-nyan. Anyway those two must have won by pure luck, so you're being forced to follow them, right-nyan? To be honest –"

She looked directly into Jibril's eyes.

"- Jii-chan has changed."

Jibril replied Azrael's words with a cold smile.

"Yes, I have changed…whereas you can't."

"…"

"As for how I was defeated in that challenge, you have nothing to say – my expectations were all for nothing."

Jibril smiled faintly in betrayal, and continued coldly:

"…The reason why I defied my late Master (Artosh) and you, is because – I just can't take your personalities anymore – too stubborn, so…"

She hesitated slightly, should she say it? Or –

Jibril decided to go with it.

She knew Azrael would take offense more than anyone.

Despite this – she decided that she would tell her, so she did.

“Which is why we lost, and until now – you still won't change.”

Hearing these words, Azrael's smile completely vanished.

To be honest – Azrael's expression was like a cold puppet.

No, it was a completely different existence with Azrael's appearance – and it spoke:

“-「Final Unit」, hast thou discovered the「Answer」?”

Jibril looked at that existence with a gaze of pure hate, and she spoke to it, almost spitting her words:

“-Yes, or more correctly, I found it long ago, it's just that I didn't have concrete evidence.”

“…”

“So now I must help the Masters find what they need, so – that's it.”

Jibril turned away, leaving behind the silent existence.

-…

“…What do you think-nyan?”

- You had to ask.

“…Yes-nyan, but what if you're wrong?”

- You don't have to ask, you know already.

“…That's right-nyan…”

-「First Unit」, I completely trust in your decision, not just me, but everyone else.

“I know, nyan…”

I know… she told herself that repeatedly.

Azrael was speaking in reply to – the will of the Phantasma (Avant Heim) residing within her.

Azrael merely looked at the people who were searching through the books –

She could only ask again when they made a move.

Part 5

“…No, we won't make it at this rate.”

Standing before a gigantic pile of books, Sora realized that their efforts were futile after a mere half-hour.

“Shiro, how many languages of this world have you learnt?”

“…Only…the Imanity, Werebeast and Elven languages…”

Shiro mumbled nonchalantly, and Sora caressed her head lovingly.

For Sora who could barely learn the Imanity language, that stunning learning pace just simply couldn't be described with「Only」.

But, despite that –

“Jibril, which languages are these?”

“It's the Dwarven and Demon languages, I can vaguely understand them…”

…Right, the only one that could understand all the books there would be Jibril.

Even though Shiro could learn foreign languages at incomprehensible speeds, the books here alone were in the millions, so relying on this few people to search for information here would be impossible, which was obvious from

the very start.

"…Jibril."

"Yes."

"There's no time, if we take too long, Ino's life will be in danger. Even if we have a lifeline, if the Seirens think we're genuinely running away, we'll be in big trouble – can't you get some help?"

They had no time to sit here and slowly gather information, as they needed to challenge the Empress once more as soon as possible.

Because of that – Sora had originally intended to rely on Azrael to gather help –

However his hopes were crushed as soon as he realized Azrael didn't have any intention of the sort.

The expression Sora saw on Azrael's face, wasn't that of a knowledgeable Flügel – nor was it something like Jibril's who was a collective of both curiosity and intelligence, nor was she a trigger-happy person.

It – was only –

"…I can get help, but I fear it may not be what you're expecting."

Yes, that would be Azrael's intentions, but –

"There's no other way, so let's do what she wants since we don't have the time to just sit here – Shiro."

"…Mm."

- Sora made a once-in-a-blue-moon fidgety gesture – he nibbled on his fingernails, and Shiro replied as well.

"- Since your original expectations were crushed, we can only adapt to the situation at hand, so we'll need you to cooperate."

"…OK…"

Part 6

"Hey, Azra…el?"

Sora decided to call upon Azrael, but froze momentarily instead.

- Probably because she had turned the scenery in the Eastern Union or the things within her knowledge into reality.

She was just like the Japanese hikikomoris Sora knew – which included Sora and Shiro themselves – exactly like that, she was buried in a kotatsu-like thing, with her head covered within a blanket, staring at a projector (television) that had only static on it –

"…What is it-nyan…? What is it so important that you have to bother someone useless like me-nyan?"

What a waste of energy – Azrael made the surroundings on her appear dark and gloomy in an attempt to accentuate her sadness.

Faced with her overly exaggerated acting skills, Sora instead felt admiration, after which he spoke with a deadpan expression:

"- Ah~ um, you know about the hibernating Empress of the Seirens right?"

"Nyaaaaa…that idiot that was influenced by fairy tales and pushed two races including herself to the brink of extinction in the span of a single generation, leaving even the shellfish speechless? Everyone knows-nyan~…"

Azrael replied under her blanket.

- While looking at her halo that was spinning about above her blanket, Sora continued while experiencing indescribable feelings:

"Y-yes, that's her, we're looking for the records of the conditions she set before starting her game."

"…If that's you want, Jii-chan knows as well-nyan! It's 「She will continue hibernating as long as she hasn't fallen in love」-nyan."

"Yes, but – that's fake."

Hearing her words, Azrael's eyes lit up with a sharp glint as though forgetting her previous depressed act.

"Oh! Is that why everyone lost-nyan? So what's the actual conditions-nyan?"

- That fellow was a Flügel after all.

"That's what I want to know, so I'm looking for all available records of people that have carried out games with her, and the exact words the players were told for comparison."

"Oh~…."

Azrael stared into space for a moment, after which she replied coldly:

"About that, if you're looking for records, they're placed in a certain somewhere, look for it yourself, and I'll inform you again if you have a definitive goal."

But – no doubt, she was different from Jibril.

"Yes, but there's too many books, we don't have time, so where are all the related records –"

"I don't know at all-nyan! Ahahahahaha~"

…

"Because of the 《 Equality Law》 -nyan~ After lending those books out countless times, even I don't know where they are-nyan~♪"

"Do you understand now? Master, this is exactly why I left my hometown."

Probably because she had forgotten she was supposed to be acting depressed, Azrael laughed cheerily while Jibril was completely solemn.

"…Since you all live to collect books, you should at least keep them properly…"

"Hmm? That's wrong-nyan, our aim is to collect 「Knowledge」, 「Books」 are actually nothing to us-nyan. I even think that as long as we can memorise the contents of the books, throwing them away is fine as well; but since the people who haven't read them would be angry, we didn't do that-nyan~"

"Do you understand now? Master, this is exactly it! The reason why I left my hometown."

Jibril smiled a smile that indicated she would strike at any moment as she explained to Sora once again.

- Sora now understood, all she was focused on was 「Knowledge」 -

「As for what that meant」 …Sora couldn't restrain his laughter, however he didn't bother explaining it, and instead asked Azrael:

"So, what should I do?"

"Hmm~ just let the people that are in charge of the books' locations to search for them! There are some others that are just as close-minded as Jii-chan, so as long as they're willing to, you should be able to get all of them-nyan~"

"Mm, so I'll leave it to –"

"I'm not in the mood-nyan~"

Seemingly wishing to appear sad once again, Azrael spoke while burying herself under the blanket once more:

"I can allow my cute imouto's toys to wander about everywhere, but I have no obligation to take care of you all. I have no value in being your companion, and even Jii-chan called me an idiot, so I'm very depressed now-nyan~ I'm very hurt-nyan~ So I don't want to do anything-nyan~"

Sora slowly passed her his phone.

"Even if I show you videos of Jibril in the shower?"

"----------No."

"If you agree now, I'll throw in the offer of her calling you 「Nee-san」 then?"

"----------N…no deal."

Azrael replied while sweating furiously, as though she was engaging in mortal combat with something.

She squeezed out her words while breathing heavily, seemingly undergoing some brutal training.

"I-I'm very~~ hurt now-nyan – something like that… ah, no, I'm not dismissing Jii-chan as something beneath me-nyan! It's just that I'm too hurt, so I need something more than that – um, you should know…what I mean right?"

Cheh – Sora grumbled silently.

He saw that amongst Azrael's deception and lies – only her devotion to Jibril was real, which was the reason why he played his trump card but to no avail.

At this rate, his actions would be limited.

Facing an opponent such as the Flügel? Having the opponent have the upper hand in a game still yet unknown to them? – What a joke.

"- To be honest, I don't care what happens to you, so if those stupid fish, mangy mutts and bald monkeys want to go extinct just let them, at the most we'll just get a few more books describing their downfall-nyan. For me, it's advantageous-nyan."

Her gaze fell upon Sora.

"To someone immortal like me…people like you who die in the blink of an eye don't even deserve the value of a 「Fairy tale」. You want me to help? Why do I have to-nyan?"

- But he couldn't let her have the upper hand, as if she did it would be all over.

If Azrael insisted on playing mind games – bring it on.

"So that's how you really are, which is why I said you're useless, can't you even detect my mockery? 「Dead man」."

Sora replied with determination but at the same time in pride – and hearing his words, Azrael's expression changed.

"A tool used by no one, a puppet with no value, I'll assume that's a pretty enjoyable life you're living there."

"-…"

"It's fine, since when we've taken over the world, people like you would definitely say something like 「Please allow me to join」 right? Because you all only know how to follow along with where the wind blows. Jibril, we'll think of a way ourselves, so let's go find your friends one by one–"

Sora stood up and turned to leave.

"…You dare to pick an argument with me, don't tell me you're running away now?"

- She took the bait, Sora smiled to himself.

"Argument? Hah! Only equals can argue with each other."

"Oh… I didn't think that you'd be so self-conscious about it, you're worthy of some commendation after all."

"- The one that's on the lower rank is you of course, did you get up on the wrong side of the bed today? Airhead."

"….Very good-nyan, who's afraid of who-nyan."

After which she raised her hand and announced.

"「Kill and plunder for the things that you desire, for that is tantamount to the decree of heaven」 -nyan!"

…

-…Hearing her extremely crass words, Sora and Shiro half-closed their eyes.

"…What kind of words are those…?"

"Ah, Masters, that's a Flügel idiom so it's fine if you don't know it."

"No, that's not what I meant."

"Not an argument – but we'll play a game-nyan, it's just that –"

Ignoring Sora and Jibril's conversation, Azrael snapped her fingers.

"「All of us」 will play a game together with Jii-chan's friends that you're looking for, then you can ask for their help."

- In an instant.

Everyone present was teleported with a force that even Jibril couldn't resist.

And what they saw after the scenery had changed was –

- A long banner with the words '「 」 Autograph and Handshake Fan Meeting' written on it.

Countless Flügel were setting up the place –

"…We were tricked-!!"

As almost a hundred gazes fell upon them simultaneously, Sora understood instantly.

- She merely pretended to be provoked – which means, he lost in the mind games department.

But, as compared to this, the gazes that were upon him nearly made Sora and Shiro black out.

However – the questions that were festering in his mind caused him to stay conscious.

It was a card that none of them had expected.

Although since Sora had already shut his ears and was prepared to faint, he didn't hear any of it.

It was probably the sound of a girl yelling for help, and the sound covered the entire area like an explosion.

Under the countless approaching gazes, Sora asked in a trembling voice:

"Hey, Jibril, what…is this? What is this-aaaaahhhhh!"

Sora yelled while frantically hugging Shiro whose eyes were already rolling up into the whites, while Jibril clapped her hands once and replied:

"Ah, I forgot, in order for them to deal with the Eastern Union, I took the Masters' 「Bible (Observation Diary)」 and passed it to them, in order for faster transmission of information –"

Jibril giggled and continued:

"I even gave them complimentary autograph vouchers, handshake vouchers, date vouchers and sleepover vouchers, don't forget all the various and dream-like special items –"

"Don't use that sort of dirty methods!! Like that even if repeated buyers increase, the buyer penetration rate wouldn't increase, right!?"

"…I see, I wanted to say that we would sell a large amount of copies but there seems to be an eerily small amount of people here, so that's the reason. Next time I'll think of an even more profitable method – or rather, a more effective way of passing information.

Jibril's face was full of determination, and she began furiously writing down stuff on a notebook, however Sora continued:

"Wait a minute Jibril! You have to report to me when you're doing things like this!!"

- No wonder Azrael knew a suspiciously large amount of information regarding them.

But since the reason for that was due to their own comrade, how were they supposed to win at their mind games?

To make it clear, the hundred Flügel present there were all Sora and Shiro's 「Fans」.

Looking over at them once more, Sora almost fainted again, however Jibril smiled –

"No problem, Masters, you've won this time."

"Huh? What?"

- Jibril spoke while looking sharply over at Azrael.

“~~~~~~~~~~~~~~”

“~~~~~~~~~~”

“~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~”

“~~~~~~~~”

- That was probably the Flügel language.

The two of them were conversing in a language that Sora and Shiro couldn't understand.

But for some reason –

The hall that was filled with a woman's screams of help since earlier…

The atmosphere suddenly changed, and what replaced it was a suffocating silence.

“- Um~ Jibril-san? I have a bad feeling about this, what are you guys talking about?”

“Ah, sorry Master, we're done talking so I'll tell you now.”

Jibril turned around.

“Just as Azrael-senpai said, we'll recruit these people's help to find our information.”

Jibril spoke with a smile on her face to the trembling Sora and Shiro.

“Essentially speaking, we just have to defeat all of them in a game♪”

“Jibril, do you know how much effort we put into just defeating you alone – who can beat such a large amount of Flügel?”

“…Shiver.”

The two were demophobic and anthropophobic in the first place…

Not to mention that they had to face off almost a hundred Flügel in Materialization Shiritori, so they would definitely not be able to survive.

Just imagining it – made Sora and Shiro's faces pale in fear.

“No, that means 「Defeating all of them at once」, luckily the opponent's demands aren't that huge.”

“Yep, you just need to play against everyone here-nyan.”

“If you win, everyone will help you collect the books that you're looking for. If you lose, I'll let the Masters choose whether you want the autograph or handshake events. These are the conditions we set down earlier.”

Damn –

The hall was filled with women's voices crying for help once more, and Sora and Shiro were at the verge of fainting.

“Jibril…do you want us to die…?”

“…Jibril…we…trusted you…”

The siblings were trembling non-stop like newborn deer.

“Please relax – the Masters won't lose, and –“

Jibril looked over at Azrael.

Azrael clapped her hands once.

“We can't possibly play Shiritori with this many people, so let's play - 「Red light, Green light」.”

“- Jibril, let me ask you again – do you want us to die?”

“…Tremble.”

Playing red light, green light against the Flügel?

They could fly and teleport freely, so if there was a place beyond their grasps…

That was basically hinting at 「The afterworld」.

While Azrael cut off his train of thought.

“But the normal version of red light, green light is too boring-nyan, so–“

“In conjunction with the nature of the Flügel – we'll use a「Word Game」 to play it.”

Jibril raised up her palm as she said this.

On her raised palm, just like a vortex–

Forty-six characters woven from light appeared on it.

Sora knew those characters – those were the forty-six – katakana.

Jibril threw those characters over to Azrael.

“Hmm~? Are these the letters of your world? Are there consonants?”

Azrael closely pondered the characters, then began moving her hand about in a complex fashion.

- Although Sora couldn't detect magic, the ground began to shake about as if something was hoisting it up from underneath, so they guessed that there was a gigantic spell being activated.

“Alright, I'm done-nyan, so let's get started-nyan?”

As she said this, the katakana – the forty-six characters from ア (a) to ン (n), on Azrael's hand – converted to light…

And they dissolved simultaneously, automatically distributing themselves individually amongst the hundred Flügel females.

After ensuring that all the characters were assigned, Azrael then said:

“The rules are simple, I have just transported the characters to a certain location on each of the women present.”

- Forty-six characters, and with the participants almost entering the hundreds, there was no way to tell who had which characters.

“The game is Red light, Green light, so for your convenience I've specially banned teleportation from being used within the game.”

- After that…

“If you both get caught by these children you lose, and if you manage to evade them for an hour it will be considered a victory.”

“As long as you touch the shifting characters – that is if you manage to do it while not getting caught, the characters will be transferred to the Masters.”

Jibril spoke with a smile on her face as if to continue Azrael's explanation.

As she finished, she threw two characters over to Azrael.

“When characters combine they become「Word Spirits」.”

Azrael raised her hand as an example, and the two letters -「コ (ko)」 and「タ (ta)」, began spinning around on her wrist, and she said:

“After you touch the「Word Spirits」, their meanings will become reality – no matter whether it's a concept or an object, you can even shift their states at will.”

“”Oh.””

In the instant that she said that, Sora and Shiro – saw the future.

Azrael combined the two characters in her hand – and then –

“- Nyaaaaaahhhhhh what is this, it's disgusting aaaahhhhhh!! Nyaaaaahhhhh!!”

A gigantic -「Tako」[8] materialized and its tentacles wrapped around –

The future Sora and Shiro saw became reality, meanwhile Azrael rolled around on the floor while yelling.

"Ah, Senpai you really are something, what with combining characters of a language you don't know to entertain us."
Jibril laughed coldly beside her, while Azrael probably genuinely felt disgusted.

In an instant – with a huge boom, the space about them exploded and the squid disappeared along with the characters.
"J-just like that, nyan?"

Sora and Shiro looked at her speechlessly with their eyes half open, while Azrael pretended as if nothing had happened.

"You can turn the meanings of the words into reality-nyan, no matter whether it's a thing, a phenomenon or a concept, it will appear just the same-nyan."
"Also, since Senpai didn't know what the words I passed her meant, what materialized was my impression of the words that I passed to her. In the actual game, the ones that can use the 「Word Spirits」 are the Masters alone♪"
"…"
She replied cheerily and nonchalantly, confessing that she had played a prank on Azrael.

However Azrael didn't seem to mind either, and she coughed and continued:

"But – once the words are used once they will disappear, so I suggest that you use them carefully-nyan!"

-…

"The explanation's over, do the Masters have any questions?"

"A lot – such as how we run away, if you don't know this by now I'll tell you. Humans can't fly."

"Tremble."

"…I apologize, Masters, I was originally going to help out – but I cannot participate in this time's game."

Her two Masters appeared surprised, while Azrael laughed and said to them:

"If you wish to borrow Jii-chan's strength it won't be considered as a competition-nyan, since no one will be able to catch you. It was already very generous on our part to allow you to use the 「Word Spirits」, so –"
Azrael giggled and…

"The Dhampir hiding over there, please lend them your wings."

…She looked over to the side.

- Just like that.

Plum was dragged out into plain sight as her invisibility spell was crushed like glass.

"…Eh? E-eh~~~~~!? W-why was I noticed!?"

"…You really are something – your presence was erased to a notable degree."

- Even Sora and Shiro had forgotten her existence, and Jibril spoke respectfully.

Azrael stood beside Jibril and asked Plum:

"Hey, even if you're a useless species that can't even be compared to a mosquito, if you put your back into it, there shouldn't be a problem in creating a spell that gives the user wings right-nyan?"
- Azrael asked her question in a disrespectful tone even more prideful than a god's.

On the other hand, Plum replied boldly despite trembling in fear of death.

"E-eh~~ i-if you want me to let them fly at a speed of a Flügel that would be impossible… The force of the shock would disintegrate not just them, but me as well, also my power is running out –"
Azrael continued to smile.

"If you're tired you can just extract body fluids from those two-nyan!"

"I will dedicate myself to create wings for you two!"

Plum's attitude changed faster than the speed of sound, and she bowed respectfully at the both of them, however –

"No, wait a minute, why do we have to agree to this –"

…As Sora was about to say that, he stopped at Jibril's gaze.

-Please don't be disappointed, and please believe –

He saw the girl that had told him that sincerely with an expectant yet disappointed gaze.

And, as he shifted his gaze, he saw the empty girl who was like an uninhabited shell, who was smiling but looked like a dead person.

"Kill and plunder for the things that you desire, for that is tantamount to the decree of heaven – that's the kind of 「Game」 it is-nyan?"

"…"

The uneasy gaze with a soul residing within it, and an empty puppet-like smile.

What Sora saw there was – a scene exactly the same as earlier – but…

-Game, this word made Sora and Shiro's eyes light up, and their brains cooled down at extreme speeds.

Rules, victory conditions, and Azrael's intentions, all those things swirled about and combined themselves at furious speeds within their heads.

"…Nii."

Shiro who was doing the exact same thing appeared noticeably uneasy, however Sora nodded his head at her, and told her – I know.

It was a noticeably different 「Game」 than they had taken part in previously.

The game would have to end before it began.

「」 followed this golden rule, however this game was –

It was a game challenged by the opposition, a game that they had not taken into account for, which meant that it was a game where the opponent had the upper hand.

It was also a game with undisclosed conditions that were hidden in the Flügel language.

It was also a game with rules intentionally prepared to be disadvantageous towards them.

This game was too dangerous, too suspicious, they didn't have enough information, so they shouldn't be agreeing to it at all.

"…Masters…please, please believe me."

Within her wavering gaze there lay a preparation to even receive punishment.

But – it was also a gaze that completely believed that Sora and Shiro would win, and it was with that in mind that Jibril had prepared the game.

"- Let me confirm the conditions."

Sora glanced over at Jibril, and asked with his mind completely calm.

And Shiro who was looking up at him uneasily since earlier, upon seeing Sora so decisive, decided to follow along with his decision.

The uneasiness in her eyes vanished, and she merely concentrated in order to sharpen her thinking.

Just like that, Sora and Shiro ignored Jibril who closed her eyes in a gesture of gratitude beside them.

The two began deducing all the things they needed to take into consideration – their brains spun about violently, pondering this game which they had not anticipated earlier, even anticipating things that they wouldn't be able to anticipate beforehand.

"- First, Shiro and I will have to hold hands throughout the entire game, and this is a definitive condition."

"…Let Plum make…wings."

"Yes, Shiro and I will each have one side of a pair of wings that will move according to our thoughts, this is a definitive condition."

"…Plum…you can do it…you have to do it."

Shiro's sentence turned from a question to an order, and Plum replied with her head drooped low in sadness.

"Eh, that…? T-that will be an extremely complex spell, if possible I don't–"

"I don't care what the shape is like, but over the course of that period I will permit you to lick off my sweat."

"Leave it to me!! I will show you the true power of the Dhampirs – hah!!"

She replied with a completely unnecessary burst of energy.

In an instant Plum's wings turned blood-red, and complex patterns appeared within her eyes.

Plum began conjuring a particularly complicated spell, and changed her appearance into –

…A scarf.

The scarf billowed in the wind gently, and landed on Sora and Shiro's necks.

Sora and Shiro were connected to each other like two people under a single long scarf.

"P-phew…I-I disguised my existence on the physical plane…!! A-at this rate…t-the two ends of the scarf…should have the capabilities of a pair of wings-!!"

Just as the first time she had met Sora, she did the same thing to their luggage as well, and Plum transformed herself into a flying scarf.

In that atmosphere where even the Flügel expressed their admiration, Sora could almost see Plum puffing out her flat chest in pride.

- Although she was panting heavily.

The scarf connecting Sora and Shiro's necks spread out at its two sides…

It drew a pattern in the air of blood trickling, and wove itself into wings. Sora nodded…

And asked the remaining question:

"- After which… transform Avant Heim into a place where Shiro, Plum and I can move about freely without restriction. Also, even though we have wings, we don't know how to use them, so I request that after we leave – the game will only start five minutes after…do you have any problems with that? Shiro."

"…Mm, no problem."

- At this time all of them took a deep breath, and it wasn't because the two of them had experienced such a drastic change in character…

Instead it was because he had only requested five minutes of extra time.

"There's no problem right?"

Jibril turned around and asked Azrael and the Flügel crowds behind her.

Using a never before used power, with a measly forty-four characters as weapons, the Imanity would have to avoid the onslaught of a hundred Flügel.

If they could do it – all of them swallowed their saliva at once.

"…Mm, there's no problem-nyan, although I feel it's a bit too lenient-nyan…"

Azrael spoke, appearing to be the only one that hadn't grasped the situation.

Her fingertips shifted gently – after which a giant explosion occurred.

"- I've already turned Avant-kun (Avant Heim) into a place befitting of your conditions – so now we can begin right?"

Azrael dismissed rewriting the appearance of another world entirely as though it were as easy as drawing a sketch.
She snapped her fingers once more, and the walls began shifting silently – and a gigantic hole appeared.

…From the hole in the wall, the entire city of Avant Heim could be seen.

Maybe because Azrael had shifted the position of the sun, or simply because some time had passed, it was night-time outside.
There was no sunlight, which made it an optimal environment for Plum.

They stuck their heads out of the gap to examine the conditions outside – Sora and Shiro grasped each other's hands tightly.

The scarf on their necks that was being blown about in the wind – they could sense that Plum was resisting the urge to say something.
They couldn't see anything done below.

However they felt a sensation as if their bodies were going to be swept away in the wind, which meant that it was at extremely high altitudes.
"So – now let's begin the game with the two Master against all the Flügel present."

Behind Sora and Shiro, Jibril announced respectfully.

And behind her there were the gazes of almost a hundred Flügel.

Despite this – once they were to enter the game, those gazes wouldn't be able to affect Sora and Shiro's thoughts any longer.
"This is the map of this version of Avant Heim."

Shiro took one look at the map that was flapping about in the wind and nodded.

While Jibril took a step back and bowed deeply.

"…Masters, thank you."

"To be honest I'm not confident at all, but… we believe in you, so you better not let us down!"

"…It's natural…to care about family."

Jibril and Sora and Shiro were engaged in a conversation only the three of them could understand –

""-「Aschente」-!!""

As Jibril and everyone else raised their hands and yelled this single word:
Sora and Shiro leaped out of the hole in the wall.

In an instant, gravity took hold of the both of them, which was a force no human body could resist.

Along with the strong winds outside, the two slowly – descended at an increasing speed.

They couldn't see what was beneath them, but whatever it was there could only be one outcome – death.

When faced with this they were impossibly not uneasy nor scared – why? Sora couldn't help but smile bitterly.

"…Nii…"

Hearing his sister calling out for him, Sora looked to the side, only to see that the other side of the scarf – had a single wing growing out of it.
Sora confirmed that there was another similar wing on his back through Shiro's gaze.

"…Let's go…"

- Yes – Sora smiled, they couldn't possibly feel uneasiness nor fear.

They grasped each other's hands, and flapped their wings together as one.

With a force even more powerful than an eagle's – they broke the shackles of gravity.

Chapter 2: Fail

Part 1

At the same time – within the capital of Elkia, inside the late king's library.

"…Kou…Steph-kou, I'm hungry, des."

Steph slowly regained consciousness as she was being violently shook by someone.

She who was originally slumped onto a table and drooling suddenly stood up and frantically surveyed her surroundings.

"- Eh!? Huh? Strange, when did I fall asleep!?"

"You fell face-first onto the table immediately after you finished eating, des. I thought you were dead, des."

- So she apparently had eaten her meal and filled her stomach then – 「Fainted」.

"W-what time is it now…?"

Steph folded up the coat – that was apparently placed there by Izuna – on her back, and asked sleepily.

After which she heard a cute rumbling sound.

Izuna placed a hand on her stomach, then looked up at Steph and said sincerely:

"About six hours after you ate, des."

"…What a cute clock."

The last time they ate was about two-o-clock at night – which meant it was morning now?

There were no windows in the library so the sun couldn't get in, but by then the streets were probably beginning to fill up with activity.

"Steph-kou, Steph-kou, let's eat, des."

Izuna dragged one of Steph's sleeves and requested for food, while Steph replied:

"Ah…you're right…so I'll make breakfast then…huh?"

Suddenly Steph spotted a huge pile of books next to where Izuna was sitting.

"Izuna, what is that?"

"…? Aren't they books, des."

"No, that's not what I meant – why are they there?"

"…Obviously because I read them, des."

"- Huh? I thought Izuna can't read the Imanity language…!?"

"I said that I would learn it, des. So I learnt it, des."

It can't be – Steph's eyes widened.

Steph had passed her a book containing games comparing the Werebeast and Imanity languages – a textbook for the Werebeast language.

Relying on that book alone, she learnt the Imanity language while she herself was sleeping, and even read such a large amount of books -?

- She was terrible at anything other than games, so conversely, as long as it's a game –

Upon realizing that she not only had learnt the language in such a short span of time, but also that she had read even more books than she did, Steph's hairs couldn't help but stiffen in shock.

"…No wonder she's always so close to Sora and Shiro."

Sora and Shiro had made her forget this fact, and now Steph recalled it.

Hatsuse Izuna, this child, this Werebeast girl that was even younger than Shiro.

- She competed against 「 」 , and even lost only by a tiny bit, so her skills were definitely the real thing.

However…

"…Izuna, when was the last time you slept?"

"…Huh? …I-I ate five meals, so… hmm~… des?"

Izuna started counting with her fingers, then suddenly appeared confused.

Black heavy eyebags were gathering underneath her eyes, which meant that she hadn't slept for quite a period of time.

- Upon closer thought, that was reasonable.

Even if it was the 「 Real thing」 , it couldn't just come naturally.

Izuna had struggled without sleeping to – learn the Imanity language, and she had read this many books as well.

"…Sorry, Izuna, I'm the only one who slept."

"Steph-kou, it's fine, des. A piece of trash is a piece of trash after all, if it wants to sleep it sleeps, des."

Steph smiled at Izuna's overexerting manner.

She had found a sliver of hope amongst this never-ending assignment and Steph patted her own cheeks to wake herself up.

Anyway, she had to prepare a meal, and then – just as she was exiting the library –

"…? Izuna, in what order are you reading these books?"

She realized the books on the floor were probably selected for some reason or other.

"I selected the ones that have a nice smell, des."

- Izuna said this incomprehensible statement with a matter-of-fact expression on her face.

Suddenly, Steph became interested in the titles of the books on the floor, so she held one up for a look.

Because they were – books related to where Sora and Shiro currently were.

"- 「 The Flügel, the weapons of a dead Master」 … why are you reading this?"

Steph recited the words written in the writing of her grandfather – the late king.

Izuna sniffed it and replied:

"There's the smell of Sora and Shiro on it, des. They read it about a month ago, des."

"Those two read this…?"

- On the beach after their return from Oceande.

Sora announced that he would proceed to Avant Heim and acquire three races.

As for the methods he would use – as usual – Steph never heard him mention them. She flipped open the book.

A month ago – which means, they read it before they attacked the Eastern Federation –

Steph read the contents of the book that were, as for all the other in the books in this room, written by her grandfather.

「 The Flügel – in the ancient great war, they were a god-killing species created by the 【 God of War Artosh】 -」

「 The Flügel – they don't gather knowledge due to their own interests.」

Those were records gathered by her grandfather – the late king from his observations of the Flügel.

Which means, they were observations of Jibril, at least they should be… but…

「 Those are actions for them to survive – no, for them to not die.」

In Steph's mind's eye, that hard to understand person appeared.

「 Living weapons of a deceased Master… They are just empty walking slabs of meat.」

She recalled that person with the smile that seemed to hide her emotions, the person that would do anything for her curiosity and her Masters, the person that could be gung-ho at times.

「The reason why they're living, no, what is the evidence to deduce as to why they're still alive?」

- Why?

The Jibril in her grandfather's observations was completely different from the Jibril she knew.

This apprehension caused Steph to stop unconsciously merely after reading a few pages, and she slipped into deep thought.

…Sora and Shiro had proceeded to Avant Heim after reading this book.

What were those two thinking –

"Steph-kou, now's probably not the time to be reading that, des." "Huh? Ah, right, yes."

What was important wasn't the Flügel, but information regarding the Seirenes – Steph rallied herself.

At this time, the grumbling noise started again.

"We should eat now, des."

Izuna spoke with a fire burning in her eyes.

Steph smiled bitterly, and as she placed the book back on the shelf – possibly due to overwork, she felt dizzy.

"Ah…"

The books began to fall off from the shelf she had placed them on.

The books they had read and the ones they haven't would be mixed together – as she was about to collapse and begin crying –

- A gust of wind blew past her.

That was the limit of what she could detect, as it was a speed that Steph couldn't react to.

Izuna sped from the door in an instant to the corner of the room, and in her mouth – was a single book.

"…? What is this, des?"

"…I-Isn't that my question? What's up with you."

Ignoring Steph who was widening her eyes in surprise, Izuna curiously sniffed the book in her mouth.

"This is the smell of fish, des…? No, des…ah!"

She uninterestedly threw away the book and said:

"This book smells of Seiren, des. I can't eat this, des."

- In an instant, a lamp turned on within Steph's muddled brain.

Regarding the order of the books she read earlier, Izuna said she read them according to how nice they smelled.

Why did she select the books Sora and Shiro had read – no, the real question was –

"W-why does my Grandpa's books smell of Seiren?"

"Who knows, des. Maybe a Seiren touched it, or maybe someone who touched a Seiren touched this book as well, des."

Izuna spoke with her head tilted slightly.

"Is it Sora or Shiro… or us!?"

"…? No, des. All the books here smell like an old man, des."

It wasn't Steph's smell, nor was it Sora and Shiro's smell.

Speaking of which, since Sora and the others went to Oceande, they shouldn't have been here – so -!?

"D-do you know when this person touched the books?"

Steph asked while leaning forward, while Izuna began counting on her fingers once more with difficulty and replied:

"Not enough fingers, des."

- However that was enough to conclude that that smell was from more than ten years ago.

"…W-wait a moment, how can you tell?"

"Doesn't Steph-kou know, des? There's a smell left behind, des."

Who would know that sort of weird thing, although she yelled this to herself, but – the riddle was solved.

The reason why Sora wanted Izuna to help, and the reason why she chose the books Sora and Shiro had read, and – all this proved that ten years ago her grandfather came into contact with the Seirenes!

Now all that was left was –!

"Can you find the books written after that?"

Izuna sniffed about then tilted her head and said:

"…The smell is weak, des. But if I try extra hard… I can probably do it, des."

- The world was filled with light.

If so, their search range would be narrowed significantly!

"Really now~ if you had that sort of convenient ability you should have used it earlier-aaaah but thank you-aaaaaahhhh finally found the exit from hell –"

Steph hugged Izuna in a sudden burst of emotion and began petting her non-stop, however Izuna jumped back all of a sudden.

"- Uuuuuugghhhhhhhh!!"

Her hair stood up as if she was going to bite at any time, and she hissed at Steph.

"Eh? U-um…s-sorry, did I do something wrong?"

"…Steph-kou, your petting skills are horrible, des!"

Steph surveyed her surroundings in panic as she noticed that Izuna was still on full alert.

What she saw was –

"Ah, r-right, t-this is for you, can you please forgive me?"

"- What is that, des?"

"I-it's a biscuit I made for myself, h-here."

Steph ate one to prove to her that they were safe to eat – and then she nervously passed some to her.

Izuna sniffed the biscuits she passed her.

"…Not bad, des. But I want to eat rice, des. And fish, des."

- She took a biscuit in her mouth, and her mood instantly turned better.

Izuna shook her bushy tail like a hamster and began gnawing on the biscuit.

"Ah, s-so I'll go make food! Grilled fish, steamed fish, sashimi… which would you –"

"All, des."

"Huh?"

"All, des."

Izuna began drooling with a longing expression on her face, and Steph –

"~Fine then! I have a reliable companion now anyway, so I'll do my best to prepare all the fish dishes I know how to!! In the meantime, could you please search for all the books my grandfather wrote around that period!?"

"OK, des!"

Izuna stood up after answering energetically.

Finally, she saw the exit! As Steph was about to exit the library, behind her –

She heard an explosion.

"What?"

- The reason why Steph knew it was the sound of Izuna breaking the sound barrier was because –

It was because her heart uttered a low roar, and began beating so fast that it seemed it would burst from her body. She held almost ten books in her hands, and her shoulders rose and fell along with her breathing – Izuna who was dyed completely blood-red from using「Blood Devastation」, reported her status.

"- Hah, hah – I found all of them, des -! Is the fish not prepared yet? Des!"

…If she tried really hard…she could probably do it.

Izuna did try really hard as she had announced earlier.

- She had tried hard enough to challenge the laws of physics, and she had used her physical abilities to overcome those very laws…

She saw Izuna with her blood vessels bulging, with her mouth drooling and her eyes having the gaze of a predator looking at its prey –

"…C-could you please help me go out and get groceries?"

Steph chose「Delaying tactics」…

Part 2

- On top of Avant Heim that was engulfed in the night sky.

Only the faint glows emitted from the cubes and the moonlight itself lit up the scenery of countless cubes scattered about.

Sora and others flew about shakily and clumsily in that scenery itself – no, they floated.

"U-um…can we really win…?"

"Please don't talk to me right now, you'll mess up my concentration!"

"…Nii…like this…a bit more…"

They looked as if they would fall and crash at a single mistake, appearing extremely dangerous.

Plum who was connecting the two as their wings mumbled to herself upon seeing their antics:

"T-the opponent are the Flügel! Even if you borrow my power, um, both of you have never flew before…it's impossible to contest against the Flügel in speed…"

Sora's tone remained relaxed even despite struggling to control his wings.

"Relax, it's definitely an advantage to be able to run away fast in a game of red light, green light – but it won't guarantee you victory."

"That's true…but even if so…"

Plum in scarf form sighed upon looking at them.

- The Flügel, even disregarding their ability to teleport, their existence itself was already defying all laws of physics.

Although Plum had never seen any of them flying at full speed, she could easily imagine it from their physical ability.

If they used their full strength – don't even mention the speed of sound, they might even be able to travel faster than that.

Even though red light, green light wasn't a contest of speed, it would be impossible for a turtle to race against a horse anyway.

No matter what, with their crass flying skills –

To achieve victory – wouldn't be -?

"…Huh? S-strange?"

As Plum thought to herself, she felt a sudden sense of apprehension.

Sora and Shiro's posture as they flapped their wings had stabilized and she hadn't noticed.

Their speed began increasing slowly, and the scarf – the winds attacking Plum became stronger.

"…Um, why did you want me to allow each one of you to control one wing?"

Plum asked them this as she suddenly remembered.

The siblings had in an instant slowly changed the wings she had woven for them to their own wings.

They looked at each other and smiled.

"Of course – because if we didn't do so, our victory wouldn't be guaranteed."

Conversely, if they were to do it they would definitely win, and they both said this while holding each other's hands.

- As long as our hands are holding onto each other.

- We won't lose to anyone.

Part 3

Empty-shelled weapons – merely objects – merely puppets – the Flügel.

They were originally tools created by their master to exterminate gods.

But it has been over six thousand years since they lost their master – why does the Flügel race continue to exist?

In order to search for that 「Answer」, they had roamed about with Avant Heim for an extremely long period of time until today.

And – Jibril who had left alone herself but had returned just as suddenly – seemed to have changed visibly.

It was just as if…yes – it was as if she had found the 「Answer」.

…

Azrael used her hands to cup her cheeks and looked up at the night sky.

In concurrence with Sora's conditions, on the balcony earlier – the hundred Flügel that had been waiting there for five minutes were looking in the same direction as well.

The images that appeared in the night sky – Sora and Shiro's figures.

"…Jii-chan, the final order that Artosh-sama ever gave me – if there's anyone who can find the 「Answer」, I believe it can only be the 「Final Unit」 Jii-chan, nyan."

"…"

- She had a reason for that.

However that wasn't the real question, and Azrael continued with that very question in mind.

"If Jii-chan's 「Answer」 was implanted in your head through the Pledges by the Imanity –"

- They had discussed the matter in their native Flügel language so as to not allow Sora and Shiro to know what was going on.

As though attempting to warn her again, Azrael smiled a smile so fake that it made it look like she was wearing a mask, and she said to Jibril:

"I will use my 「Special Right」 - you do know what this means right?"

"Yes, but -! Only stupid people ask questions to which they already know the answers! Senpai."

Upon hearing these words, the Flügel that were looking up into the night sky suddenly tensed up, making the atmosphere much heavier in an instant.

- The 「Representative of the Winged」 - the head of the 「Council of Eighteen Wings」, Azrael –

The only special right Azrael possessed for not being the full representative of the Flügel was…

It was something that was agreed over six thousand years ago with an unanimous decision from everyone.

"- 「The right to order all the Flügel to commit suicide」 ...is there something wrong?"

Azrael's gaze sharpened instantly at Jibril's dismissive tone.

"It was a right originally created by Azrael-senpai while we were still discovering our purpose to continue living after our master was killed in order to prevent us from committing suicide, so if you think that we have no reason to continue to exist – please feel free."

At this point the emotion that swept through the crowd was not fear – the Flügel did not fear death in the first place.

They were a race created as weapons, so to them death would even be considered an honour.

Despite this, the reasons why the participants felt tense was because they were 「Anticipating」.

- For something to start, or possibly for something to end.

That was the only difference, but –

Everyone only felt anticipation at that sort of prediction.

"…It's good that you know-nyan…"

While the only one present that didn't seem to understand what had happened was Azrael.

Jibril looked at her somewhat disappointedly upon realizing so.

- Her gaze slowly corroded Azrael.

"Azrael-senpai, you of all people should know, we – the Flügel have a very basic misunderstanding."

- Sora and the others didn't know.

But it was because Jibril had met them – after which she had changed significantly.

Before losing to Sora and the others, Jibril – even if she was the type to act immediately after something went amiss, she was pretty much the same as Azrael.

Turning the unknown into known – that was the only thing that was meaningful to her.

She had to reverse the unknown, and there was no ulterior motive behind it, all she meant was – it was an 「Enemy」 she had to exterminate.

Jibril was probably hungrier for combat than any other unit against that 「Enemy」.

- However, her views changed on the very day she lost to Sora and Shiro.

"The knowledge that we spent thousands, tens of thousands of years gathering was completely obliterated by the Masters who have barely walked ten years upon this earth, and the meaning behind this, the very significance of it – Senpai, you just don't understand."

"…"

Her face was filled with a passion that Azrael had never seen before.

According to her memory, she had never seen Jibril do that, not even to Artosh.

“It's a perplexing feeling, even more intense than the passion of eliminating the unknown. It's a way of life, continuously reversing into unknowns that led me to follow my Masters by my own will – it's completely unrelated to the pledges.”

Azrael remained speechless at Jibril's words.

Because to be honest, she had no idea what they meant.

Turning the known to unknown? – Wouldn't that sort of thing cause a person to feel horrified?

- But...

Maybe because they were moved by Jibril's words…

Upon hearing her brief speech, the hundred Flügel that couldn't wait to get moving had a tint of excitement in their eyes – and their wings trembled.

- Azrael couldn't understand why that was, and she once again cupped her cheeks with her hands.

At least that wasn't the 「Answer」.

She looked up into the empty skies just like that – at the clumsily flying pair.

“I know Azrael-senpai cares more than anyone about the future of the Flügel, but –“

“…”

She glanced to the side, only to see Jibril with an expression of utmost determination on her face, and she spoke in an almost begging fashion:

“The answer you're seeking for isn't where you think it is.”

Part 4

“Hnnnnnnnnggg~……hnnnnnnnnnnnnnggggg~~…. I-I'm at my limit…too tiring, I wanna give up…”

“Hey, it's not even been three minutes! Even Ultr*man[9] is tougher than you, you know!?”

Plum (scarf form) was complaining since almost the very beginning, while Sora provided her with words of encouragement.

“I'm different from those Flügel monsters! Overcoming the force of gravity and your weights combined is harder than both of you can imagine!! I even have to lend you my wings as well – please spare me –“

“If you're gonna talk about sweat, I've sweated a lot already, so you can lick it off for all I care!”

“For you two, how could I possible give up! – Right, let's continue on!!”

“You've completely ruined the atmosphere!!”

The sensation of his neck being licked sent an unpleasant tingle down his spine.

The scarf that Plum was disguising as…

It was a disguise on her 「Physical appearance」, in order to give others the impression that she was connecting Sora and Shiro in the form of a scarf.

The two ends of the scarf moved along with Sora and Shiro's wills, and they served the same purposes as a pair of wings.

“Hey, to us this looks like a scarf with wings, but what does it actually look like?”

“Lick…ah, how blissful ♥ - huh, what? Um~ I'm currently hugging Sora-dono's neck and licking it…and using my foot to hook onto Shiro -dono's neck.”

“Heh, isn't this a perverted way to fly!”

“…Nii, that joke was bad, you're noisy…and it's lame…”

"I was just saying, did you really have a need to go that overboard!?"

A streak of tears flashed past Avant Heim's night sky.

However Plum rebutted impatiently:

"Let me make this clear, it's the special right of the Elves to cast multiple spells at once! A magic such as turning myself into a flying scarf while allowing you both to fly at your own will is extreeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeemely worthy of praise, OK!!"

Plum uttered this extreeeeeeeeeeeeeeeemly long sentence.

"Also, this is more tiring than I expected…if my supply of energy gets cut, I'll probably die within a few seconds."

"…I'm surprised you'd agree with something this dangerous."

"Huh? Because if I do this I can lick Sora-dono's neck to my heart's content…slurp~ delicious, delicious."

"AHHHH! I'M TAKING THIS SCARF OFF RIGHT NOW!!"

As Sora was considering ignoring the consequences and stripping off the scarf altogether –

"…Nii, the time."

Five minutes had passed – Sora's gaze sharpened upon hearing Shiro's warning.

Which meant at this time, the Flügel that had a late start would begin attempting to catch them.

"- Right, Plum, our lives are in your hands now, so don't you go running out of energy halfway!"

"No problem. Our fates are tied, so if I do run out of energy halfway we'll just die together at most."

"We don't need to think about that!! Let's go already!"

As he said this, Sora and Shiro immediately began flapping their wings mightily and simultaneously – dropping their altitude at once.

"Kyaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!"

They accelerated in that instant so quickly that even Plum had to cry out.

The speed of their descent and the power of the wings caused them to accelerate endless, and the strong winds rushed to meet them –

As they were about to hit the ground – the back of Avant Heim, they began flying laterally.

(They're attempting to shake off our pursuers with the momentum from our descent…probably.)

Plum didn't say anything but merely thought to herself, after which she grumbled: But –

A presence came up from behind, as the Flügel that had just left were already catching up to them.

Sora and Shiro really had completely mastered control over their wings with an astounding speed.

But – no matter how they were to commandeer the wings woven by Plum, they would still be unable to overcome the laws of physics.

It was already a blessing that they could reach two hundred kilometres per hour, however the Flügel on the other hand were an existence that simply threw the laws of physics out of the window.

(A-at this rate they'll catch up to us in no time aaaahhhh what do we do now!?)

Plum began yelling to herself, however Sora and Shiro merely turned around to look calmly –

"Four of them, no formation."

"…Letters, one, three…"

"Direction, recover?"

"…One bottom of the wing「ナ (na)」…three left side of stomach「ア (a)」."

"- Shiro three, let's move!"

- They had a brief conversation which Plum completely couldn't understand, as they had completed their discussion within a minute –

Huh? As Plum let out this curious expression, Sora and Shiro had already veered their courses slightly.

- In an instant.

"Hehe~ I'll be the first~!"

"I'll take that!"

As they expected, the five minutes of waiting time had meant nothing to them, as two Flügel were already approaching.

Their hands closed in on Sora and Shiro – but missed.

""- Huh!?""

The two that were unable to catch Sora and Shiro couldn't seem to comprehend how they managed to vanish from their eyes in an instant, causing them to utter a confused exclamation. At that time –

""Ah!!""

- Behind them.

On the bottom of the wing and the left side of the stomach respectively – the characters inscribed there were touched, and both of them let out a gentle moan.

The other two behind them were slightly late and ended up losing their quarry, and they began surveying their surroundings frantically.

That was no surprise, as by then Sora and Shiro were already flying towards the connected cubes in a spiral pattern.

They darted and wove through the cracks – through the streets of Avant Heim – towards the connected cubes.

The two 「Characters」 were already on their respective hands.

"…Huh? Just now…what was that!?"

It happened in such a short instance that even Plum who was wrapped around their necks couldn't comprehend what had happened.

On the other side of the disguising magic, Plum widened her eyes in surprise, and Sora said to her:

"Barrel roll – isn't this one of the basic techniques to avoid a flying unit that is faster than you and is flying in a straight direction?"

- As Sora and Shiro noticed that they had company, they drew them in as close as possible then slightly veered their course, in order that among the four of them – the two inscribed with characters would take the lead, and they merely had to turn slightly.

And in the instant as they were about to be caught, they spread their wings, and merely – rolled over in a diagonal fashion.

So, with their general direction remaining the same, Sora and Shiro decelerated as they spun spirals in the air. On the other hand, the Flügel thought that Sora and Shiro had simply disappeared as they were too fast – simply speaking, they merely 「Overshot」.

They were still unused to their wings, and they would never be able to reach the speeds of that of a Flügel's no matter how hard they tried, so –

"Since we can't control our wings we just have to stop in our tracks, and for the Flügel who completely ignore aerodynamic studies at the like – they are merely fighter planes flying along a fixed path…"

"…Even if they know…they never bothered about it…"

Both of them smiled mischievously, and on their hands were exactly what Shiro had declared earlier – the characters 「ナ (na)」 and 「ア (a)」 were swirling about there.

Plum was speechless, having just realized what had happened.

"…Don't tell me – you memorized the positions of all the characters!?"

Sora smiled bitterly and replied:

"Plum, are you underestimating my glorious sister?"

This sentence alone made even one such as Plum feel pressured, and she shut her mouth.

"Anyway…Shiro, the words we really need…you should know them right?"

"Of course."

"So we need to get hold of those people, also our opponents aren't exactly dimwits, so our aerial strategy won't work all the time."

"…Mm, understood…"

- Get hold of. Those two declared that naturally as if it was bound to happen, causing Plum to widen her eyes in shock.

They were clearly playing a game of red light, green light against the Flügel, however they themselves acted as if they were the pursuers.

Sora and Shiro flew about in the city of Avant Heim just like 「Passing through cracks」.

Part 6

- On the floor where only two people remained after the rest of the Flügel had left.

Jibril and Azrael stood together and watched the events unfolding in the air before them.

The feelings within Jibril's chest – turned into 「Shock」 extremely quickly.

Shiro had memorized all the characters and the people who possessed them, and even where they were.

That was why they could pull off the avoid and recover maneuver so flawlessly earlier – however, what shocked her even more was that they knew the city like the back of their hands, as they were flying about as if it was their own backyard. Jibril couldn't hide her shock at her two Masters.

The city of Avant Heim with countless cubes stacked up in complex formations was lit up extremely dimly under the moonlight in the surrounding darkness, however they could still duck and weave throughout the spaces between the cubes like skilled weavers passing threads through needles.

They were still lacking in speed, however in this case if their pursuers were to go too fast they would lose them instead.

The narrow, dark alleyways and cracks that were formed between the cubes –

Even the cracks that could barely fit a single person through were easily overcome by the flying two, so if their pursuers were to go too fast – if they were to let down their guard they would crash into the cubes, leaving them a clear escape route.

(…They're really something…but if so -)

There was one part she couldn't explain, and Jibril began questioning it.

Jibril couldn't deny the fact that the Flügel as a race – did have the tendency to achieve victory through brute force.

But despite this, they could still 「Coordinate」. If they couldn't, they wouldn't deserve the right to be called 「Weapons」.

Even if they didn't have 「Speed」, they would switch to a 「Surrounding」 strategy – and –

"Huh!? Huh, why-!?"

A Flügel female uttered a lamenting cry, as they were all standing guard by the crack Sora and the others flew into which had only one exit – however both of them flew out through a way they hadn't expected.

Sora and Shiro avoided their grasp easily.

They had only caught an extremely short glimpse of the map, and they had gotten such a deep understanding of the entire city (Avant Heim) within that period of time?

- Impossible. If it was one of the Masters – Shiro, there was a possibility that she could memorize the map within seconds.

However the city was built from various, countless complexly stacked cubes of different structures and heights, so it would be impossible to truly master the alleyways and shortcuts of the city with the map alone, if so how did they do it –

Just like that, even Jibril who was observing them for the longest time finally realized that she suspected her own explanation more than anyone else.

Part 7

(Huh? Y-you're joking right?)

Sora and Shiro's tightly interlocked hands – Plum saw that their fingers were moving about intricately.

Plum was resisting the urge to moan pitifully as hard as she could since earlier, and as for her theory behind how those two could duck and weave between all those narrow caves and alleyways – it could even be called fallacy – and this fact made Plum so shocked she was unable to say a word.

Which meant, possibly, probably, although somewhat unbelievable – it could be the case.

Shiro would fly along the streets according to her memory, and confirm the average size of the cubes.

After which she would calculate mentally to decipher the order of the patterns of the stacked cubes, then find the small passageways created due to those height differences.

And she transmitted that information to Sora not through words, but instead through hand signals.

While Sora would reply with ways to shake off, trick, bait, and deceive their pursuers.

- What other response could Plum have other than remaining speechless?

To Plum, no, possibly to anyone, that would be beyond comprehension.

Communicating using finger movements, but it wasn't information on a mere level of 「Move here」 or 「Go there」.

From the touch of their hands, they could decipher each other's intentions, as these two Imanity that had a wing each flapped their wings in the air and moved seamlessly, without any form of hesitation, as though their clutched hands were a combined part of their reflexes.

There was no doubt about it that they still weren't completely used to the procedure.

Their flying still carried a slight hint of jerkiness – and because of that.

Plum was even more surprised at this unbelievable sight.

Holding each other's hands – the two formed a pair of wings.

When a wing on one side were to master the wing woven by Plum more efficiently and overcome the forces of gravity.

The other wing would simply master the other half's movements and play along just before being thrown off.

Throughout the span of each flap, they learnt from each other and passed down their knowledge between them as well, without any mistakes nor hiccups.

- They were endlessly improving at a stunning speed.

Upon seeing this, Plum sensed a chill rolling down her spine, those two – were more than she imagined –

- At this time, the previously silent two spoke.

“Left four, four pull.”

“…Left サ (sa) と (to) オ (o) ス (su), right カ (ka) マ (ma) ヌ (nu) ク (ku) missing one.”

“Return, top, twelve?”

“…Character five, complete…but dangerous.”

Both of them conversed in a code-like manner, however Sora finally replied cheerfully in a normal fashion.

“Even if it’s dangerous we still have to do it -! Let’s begin our attack!!”

“…Understood! Shiro left Nii right, left shoulder right wing left hip left arm!”

Immediately as she finished –

“Yaaaahhhh!!”

They spun about a breakneck speeds as if their wings – which meant Plum – had split into two, and they flew into a narrow hole –

“-! We’ve finally got them cornered!”

“Pincer attack, this is my time to shine!!”

Sora and Shiro accidentally – according to Plum’s point of view – stumbled into a wide road.

What awaited them was four Flügel on their left and right respectively – and as they had said, it was a perfect pincer attack.

However Plum suddenly remembered what they had said earlier.

-「Left right four, four pull」…Draw them out – then attack?

The Flügel which were a total amount of eight were closing in at an extremely rapid pace, but – if so –

“Let’s move, Shiro!!”

“…OK!”

- Who exactly were the ones driven into a corner –

Sora and Shiro clapped their open palms together, forming a「Word Spirit」.

The characters that were originally on their respective hands combined – and emitted light.

Facing the onslaught of the eight Flügel, the two – yelled with their palms facing opposite directions:

“”-「Hole (ア ナ ana)」!””

- In an instant.

The eight Flügel that were charging towards Sora and Shiro –

“--…Huh?”

Passed through them, and them appeared on opposite sides.

“Ah!”

Leaving behind eight moans, Sora and Shiro once again flew into the cracks between the cubes.

In a narrow passageway that could just about fit one person, Sora flew horizontally and laughed.

“サ (sa) と (to) オ (o) ス (su) – what do you think, Shiro, I got all of them!”

“…カ (ka) マ (ma) ヌ (nu) ク (ku)…now we have eight…”

The both of them confirmed the four glowing characters that were spinning around on their respective palms in a matter-of-fact fashion.

- Plum asked them fearfully.

“…Um, just now…what was that…”

“What else, it was a「Hole」, a「Word Spirit」 that would take effect on anyone it comes into contact with – which is the rule of this game.”

“…So…we opened a hole…in「Reality」.”

Plum began recalling what had happened.

They had opened holes on their left and right using themselves as the center, then connecting them together in order to avoid the Flügel.

Once they were to emerge from it they would of course be facing Sora and others with their backs – and to return the「Characters」 - however more important than that…

“…Could it be, you're only baiting the people that have characters on them!?”

“Of course, but we haven't got all the ones we want yet.”

Sora admitted nonchalantly, and he looked up in satisfaction after looking at his wrist that had various letters strung up around it like beads.

- Plum looked up along with him.

…After which four, five, eight – twelve Flügel began darting at them at an astonishing speed.

“Waaaah what are we going to do-aaaahhhhh!”

“Return, from the top, pull twelve – everything's going according to plan, don't panic.”

“…Nii, can you make it?”

Sora and Shiro flew at high speeds through a crack that could just about fit one person.

Which meant, when they were to reach the next open space, the amount of Flügel that would be swarming them at once would be – twelve.

While Sora smiled cockily –

“Yep, no prob-lem-aaaaahahahhhhhhhhh!?”

Sora's body lost its balance as his neck was being licked by Plum all of a sudden.

They reached the open space – and in front of twelve oncoming Flügel, Sora had lost his balance, and because of that his center of gravity –

“…Nii!?”

“….Waaaaahhh!?”

As he was about to be thrown off, Shiro frantically flapped her wing in an attempt to maintain their balance.

However Sora who almost crash-landed had no time to properly capture the figures of the oncoming Flügel.

“Shiro, goooooooo!”

- Sora immediately made a decision, as he had no time to get back in position.

Sora stretched his hand out to Shiro – he trusted that Shiro could understand his intentions, and passed his「Word Spirits」 to her.

Shiro grasped Sora's hands, allowing the characters to move, after which she let them go and threw them into the sky –

“-「No entry (ト オ サ ヌ toosanu)」 …!”

- As she said this, the twelve approaching figures, just as they were about to come into contact with Sora and Shiro, suddenly –

“Ouch!”

“Ah!”

Pitter-patter – no, it wasn't such a gentle noise.

A huge, cannon-like explosion was heard, and the Flügel all violently slammed into an invisible wall.

But the problem was -!

Shiro looked over at Sora, and according to the plan – they were supposed to spiral upwards rapidly.

- 「No entry」. She was forced to create a barrier with these four words in order to prevent their enemies from passing through.

And in the instant when that would occur, they would only act on the five that had characters inscribe on them, or at least that was the plan –

"Heh-aaaaaahhhh!"

- He made it, Shiro thought while appearing immensely relieved.

While he left the activation of the 「Word Spirits」 to Shiro, he spent that time to regain his composure and turn to his original position.

Sora even began sweating cold sweat, and he flapped his wing while Shiro cooperated –!

As the twelve Flügel slammed into the invisible wall and were stopped in their tracks, the two passed through the Flügel crowds –

"Dammit, Shiro – it's up to you!"

"Mm!"

Shiro didn't manage to tell Sora which one of them had characters on them.

Shiro stretched out her hand, and then –

Since it still wasn't enough, she used her two legs – and even her wing to gather up all the characters.

"Uggghhhhhh~~~ don't think about running –"

"Dream on!"

Shiro's wing was nearly grabbed onto, however Sora flapped his wing and shifted their centre of gravity.

They had avoided a death trap extremely narrowly, and the two landed below the invisible wall – flapping their wings just as they were about to hit the ground – then flew into another narrow corridor…before they could say they were safe.

"…Phew….phew!"

Sora's shoulders convulsed violently as he breathed, and he finally managed to regulate his breathing, just as Shiro was about to ask about his condition –

"A-about that… are both of you alright?"

- The culprit that had brought this crisis upon them (Plum) did it before her.

Sora bit onto the scarf and yelled with his voice muffled.

"- Plum~~~! Do you want us to die together!?"

"I-I-I-I-I'm sorry! It was because of that sudden spiral, my mouth left Sora-dono's presence – and I even previously said that if I were to lose a source within a few seconds I would die!! So of course if we're going to die we might as well die together, see you all in hell!!"

This fellow must have a huge amount of courage to say things like that.

While Shiro managed her own violently breathing heart – and spoke while looking the characters on her hand:

"…Nii…ソ (so) ワ (wa) ケ (ke) ユ (yu) ラ (ra)…we have them…so now…"

"Yep, we've finally completed it."

「ラ (ra) ユ (yu) ス (su) マ (ma) ク (ku) ケ (ke) ソ (so) カ (ka) ワ (wa)」 - the two chuckled upon thinking of the 「Word Spirits」 those characters could create.

As they exchanged glances and nodded at each other – they flapped their wings mightily.

The two who were darting through the cubes earlier, were now – climbing up into the skies.

“- Ah, found it!”

“Hmm…are they changing their strategy again?”

They were spotted immediately. However their pursuers reacted more vigilantly this time at Sora and Shiro's appearance.

They didn't travel in a straight line, and instead approached their circuit in a circular formation as if to surround them.

- No one had probably thought of it.

Because Plum didn't manage to predict it either.

In front of the Flügel that surrounded them, the two clasped their open palms together to form a 「Word Spirit」.

- As three characters disappeared, they touched them and yelled:

“-「Accelerate[10]」-!!”

Part 8

Not only the pursuers.

Even Plum and Jibril who was spectating the entire thing were speechless.

From the beginning of the game, from the time they got their wings, barely fifteen minutes had passed.

They were merely two Imanity each with a single wing created by Plum.

- They merely left behind a shockwave while they themselves were already long gone.

- They had charged straight through the oncoming Flügel, who could have predicted that?

Although, if it was an acceleration created by the 「Word Spirits」, it could actually happen.

That was why they could overcome the limitations of physics upon their wings.

Acceleration, speed, light speed – the two had planned to collect and form those 「Word Sprits」 before the game had even began. If not, facing an enemy that could adapt to and change their strategy according to Sora and Shiro's actions – essentially an opponent that could 「Learn」 and 「Adapt」, they wouldn't be able to survive for an hour. Thus they flew about between the cubes at a speed, focusing more on baiting and collecting – as Jibril saw this, her eyes narrowed as if she had just seen the light

- Because it meant that the two trusted in the Flügel.

“Hah! This is fun!”

“…Mm!”

Both of them soared and spun about in the air like dancers, and their laughter – spread across Avant Heim.

- Lovebirds.

This term sprung up from Jibril's mind.

However – this term didn't seem quite right, and she shook her head.

What she was looking at wasn't the figurative kind of lovebird.

She was sure that it was the true, original meaning of the 「Lovebird」.

The males and females each had one eye and one wing and would fly together with their bodies combined, a fictional organism.

(…And a being just like that is flying happily right over there.)

Jibril watched them closely and seemingly proudly – but…

"…"

Azrael who was gazing from them afar, appearing rather bored and disinterested, still didn't seem to manage to grasp the meaning of it.

- Upon seeing her like that, Jibril said silently:

"Senpai, do you know the reason why I'm against the 「Equality Law」?"

"…Because Jii-chan is close minded and doesn't like other people touching her books-nyan?"

"No, it's because – I enjoy reading the same books over and over."

- It was the first time Azrael had heard of such a thing, and she stared at her in shock.

"…Why is that so-nyan? Wouldn't it be fine if you just memorize them?"

"Yes, I knew you would say that, which is why I never said it previously…"

Jibril sighed, and she continued again in a fit of determination:

"Even if you've read a book once before, after you gather more knowledge, you'll learn even more things even after reading them again."

"…"

"So if you want to read them again you can't, wouldn't that be annoying – don't you get it?"

"...Don't get what-nyan?"

"- Once you memorize it, it's over."

Jibril bent her head low while giving her this painful piece of advice – however…

- Azrael still seemed extremely confused.

Ignoring Jibril's opinion for now, what she didn't understand the most was –

"- What does have to do with what's going on now-nyan?"

…

…Jibril looked into her eyes – extremely sadly.

Her gaze wasn't that of underestimation, nor was it a mocking one.

It was one of betrayal at her anticipation being ignored, a gaze of gradually increasing disappointment and sadness at having her anticipation being betrayed every single time.

- She couldn't understand her sister's anticipation, which pierced her heart even more than anything else.

"What is it-nyan…what did I do wrong-nyan…!"

Part 9

Above Avant Heim, a single silver trail cut through the night sky.

The sound barrier had been left behind long ago, and the flying Sora and Shiro – couldn't be caught by anyone.

"Now as long as we don't get too careless, we won't get caught."

Sora and Shiro held each other's hands and sped through the night sky, and although Sora said this, but –

"…But, the collecting…of the 「Characters」…"

"Yes, I know, although we want to play, we definitely have to collect all the characters to finish this level perfectly, and…"

Sora agreed with Shiro's words, after which he continued solemnly:

"- I've already figured out a 「Word Spirit」 to retaliate that person."

"That person…? Who are you referring to?"

Plum asked a question, however Sora ignored it and turned around.

Relying on speed to increase their distance between them was good – but in order to collect the 「 Characters」 they had to get close, and that always came with the risk of being caught, not to mention that their opponent was the Flügel. Also – Sora thought to himself in a cautious tone:

- Don't forget, this game was something we didn't expect – it was a game on their home turf.

No matter how much they kept their guard up, it was impossible to completely avoid it.

"…Huh, interesting."

Sora mumbled to himself, very good - this is truly a game that deserves to be played!

So let's decrease the risk as much as we can – so we had better collect as many characters as we can.

That was sort of their insurance policy, which was increasing their 「 Word Spirits」 , so even if they get into an unpredictable situation - and Sora who was facing behind – suddenly had a glint in his eye.

"…Huh?"

Shiro let out a curious mumble upon seeing that glint, but –

"- Cheh~~!?"

This was the 「 Unpredictable Situation」 Sora was thinking about earlier, and to this Sora had reacted in advance. He took himself as a pendulum and swung downwards – and while still going along the same direction, he shifted their 「 Axis」 , and spun around in a curve.

"U-um, what are you doing – kyaaaaaahhhhh!?"

A burst of light shot through the 「 Position」 they were in previously, cutting off Plum's words.

- Shiro was just about to praise her brother's unbelievably fast reaction speed and judgement time, however before that –

"Jibri~~~llll!! What is that! I never heard you mentioning anything about that! We can attack!?"

…His composure earlier had completely disappeared, and Sora yelled suddenly, and above his head – with a small poof…

A tiny Jibril of about four heads tall appeared to explain the situation.

"No, Masters, that wasn't an attack, it's a 「 Capturing Magic」 that stalks its target."

"Are you telling me that wasn't a 「 Bullet」 ?"

"No, that thing does no damage at all, as it's just a magic that binds the enemy and pulls him to yourself, it doesn't have any potential for destruction as its aim is merely to capture its target. So it's different from the 「 Bullets」 in the Masters' world –"

Sora scratched his head and roared in response to Jibril's chatter:

"So let me rephrase my sentence, you never mentioned that long-distance tools could be used! Don't we have any? Plum!!"

"Don't go so hard on me! Double casting is a talent natural only to the Elves, also if I continue to use another spell, I'm actually going to shrivel up and die! I've licked Sora-dono's neck so much that it's starting to swell!"

"I don't care whether it's swelling or not! I'm covered in cold sweat anyway, so why don't you just lick my back!"

"Really!? Let's eat~! Ah~ mm♥"

Her wails suddenly turned into groans of pleasure, and Sora turned around, speechless at Plum's actions.

Being a match on the Flügel's home turf, Sora was just thinking about unforeseen circumstances – and as he thought about that they occurred immediately!

The opponent did say they would 「 Ban teleportation」 - but…

- They never said to 「Ban magic」 -

"Dammit – I realized it too late!"

"…We should have expected it…!"

- Regarding the 「Word Spirits」, the rules would be too much in their favour if they could win through the 「Word Spirits」 alone.

When they realized their mistake of not realizing that earlier, Sora and Shiro – no, Shiro gnawed on her fingernails, feeling extremely frustrated.

Rules to attack the opponent… this language loophole was her responsibility to discover since she was the one that would memorize everything word for word.

Sora stroked Shiro's head and said:

"It's normal for games like these that we couldn't anticipate, so there's no use crying over spilt milk, what's important now is –"

"…Mm."

- Being a surprise game that they didn't have complete knowledge about, it was reasonable to think that unpredictable things like that could happen.

Despite this they could still win – because adapting to their opponent's actions extremely quickly was the true ability of 「」 - there was no time to regret!

"- Jibril, how many shots can that thing fire?"

"Let me think…it varies for the abilities of different people, but about six shots I guess?"

"- It's hard to handle, but since there are only six shots our opponents won't waste their ammunition, thus –"

"Ah, it's not like that, Master."

At this point Sora who was facing behind saw multiple shadows land on the cubes – the Flügel.

They raised their palms – and the night sky turned so bright it was like daylight.

"It's that 「Up to six shots can be fired at once」, there's no limit to the amount of shots!"

"I actually thought that monsters like you would have such things as 「Limitations」 for a moment there, I'm so stupid!"

"…Nii, over here -!"

This time Shiro was the faster one to react, and she flapped her wing vigorously.

Sora immediately left behind the mini-Jibril and followed Shiro without reply, and they accelerated together.

The 「Binding Light」 drew a complex pattern in the air as it approached – although if it was homing as Jibril had said –

"…Mm!"

Shiro flapped her wing once as hard as she could, and Sora played along, having understood her intentions from her hand motions.

Countless streaks of light approached them, and even Sora and Shiro who had used the acceleration 「Word Spirit」 from earlier couldn't escape their clutches.

And as the light approached their backs - 「Chandelle」 [11].

They turned diagonally upwards at a forty-five degree curve from flying straight, turning their speed to altitude, and climbed upwards – since the 「Binding Light」 would probably activate its proximity fuse as it reached a certain distance away from them – a flash of light burst from behind them as their sharp ascent caused their speed to decrease which allowed the 「Blinding Light」 to approach – and it triggered.

"Aaaaaahhhhh!"

Ignoring Plum's cries, Shiro immediately cancelled their original sharp ascent with a slight flip of her wing.

She didn't turn around, instead she flapped her wing again and once again began their ascent, distancing themselves from the exploding lights behind them.

- They dodged it. Just as they were catching their breath, streaks of light once again surged at them, and Shiro attracted them all to her then swapped her direction.

She baited them with the exact same method from earlier, however this time she darted diagonally downward, changing altitude to speed. As for the countless lights that exploded behind them, she escaped them with the same momentum, and she acquired speed from this –

"Yaaaaaaahhhhh!"

Plum who was still in wing form let out a cry, as being in a state of ultra-high speeds had caused the wings to stop flapping.

They spiralled about in the air, drawing circles with their bodies, dodging the countless lights that exploded within close proximity of them.

However this time they spun about in the other direction while flapping furiously to avoid the remaining lights.

Sora and Shiro flew together in a horizontal fashion, and they flew into the cracks between a slightly larger cube – after which –

Countless explosions and flashes of lights occurred at the opening of the crack.

- Since it was a 「 Homing device」 , they just had to 「 Lure」 it.

It was Shiro's responsibility to calculate the paths of the lights they had to avoid –

"Phew…phew…"

However Shiro was sweating cold sweat and panting uncontrollably as if she had just survived an Itano Circus[12].

It was as if she had these words written on her face: I must do all I can in repentance for not realizing that they never prevented the usage of magic.

And that sense of responsibility caused her to still appear unsatisfied even after that glorious display of skill from earlier.

"- Shiro, I'm really proud to have you as my sister."

Sora fondled his sister's head while flying through the narrow cracks, and he complimented her, after which –

"I can't take this anymore, I want to withdraw from this game, if this goes on my body won't be able to take it!!"

In order to keep up with their movements, the wings – Plum was extremely exhausted.

That pressure caused her to cry out like that, and from her teary tone it was evident that she was at her limit.

And – Sora pondered with cold sweat running down his back as well - after they were to get out of the alleyway…

There would definitely be a large amount of Flügel lying in wait.

From the way the Flügel were able to adapt that Sora had observed, he was sure that they wouldn't pass up this chance.

"-…Nii…Shiro is…"

- They would definitely account from their previous evasion method as well.

The 「 Binding Lights」 would undoubtedly come in multiples and with slight time differences between them.

If so even someone like Shiro wouldn't be able to avoid all of them, not to mention that Plum was at her limit.

So – Sora and Shiro looked down at their wrists.

- They had only the 「 Word Spirits」 to save them, but the characters they had were - 「ラ (ra) ユ (yu) ス (su) マ (ma) ケ (ke) ワ (wa) 」

All of them were characters extremely hard to use in a word game -!

Sora cursed to himself anxiously. They had only a few more seconds in the passageway before the exit.

In a few seconds, he had to think of a word that could allow them to avoid or shield them from the oncoming countless flashes of light -!

"「Defeat[13]」! No... Nii, I'm sorry–"

Shiro unconsciously uttered the first word she thought of, after which she immediately corrected herself.

Although in reality, it was the「Word Spirit」that was the most likely to take effect.

How could they use the characters to block the attacks? Barrier, shield, reflect, avoid – they lacked the characters needed for all of those.

(A way to reverse this situation – to reverse it -!)

Sora clenched his jaw and worked his brain at a speed that as if it was going to overheat, they had six characters, and all of them were extremely hard to use.

The「Word Spirit」needed to reverse the situation – reverse… no.

"- Reversing the situation… that's my job -!"

"…Huh?"

Shiro replied curiously to Sora's mumblings.

In an instant – in Sora's mind, gears began whirling and meshing together, and multiple thoughts began overlapping.

- As Jibril had said, it was a capturing magic that would activate in extremely close proximity to its target like a proximity fuse.

- At a speed even faster than the Flügel, which Sora and Shiro definitely wouldn't be able to avoid.

And as the light was about to be fired, what Sora saw was – as those memories combined into one, Sora smiled.

"Why do we have to avoid it – isn't this a great opportunity!! Shiro, ascend."

"What~~!?"

If they were to ascend they would be hit by the「Binding Light」, however Plum was the only one that let out a cry of agony at Sora's words.

"…Understood."

Shiro flapped her wing and rose upwards – since her brother had reached that conclusion, she needed no other evidence.

They continued to ascend at high speeds, and flew upwards along the tunnel – then exited it.

As expected –

A rain of light that dyed the night sky bright white fell upon them.

"Waaaaaaaaaahahahhhhhhhhhhh!!"

It didn't have any destructive power, however it was still a magic of the Flügel.

If they were caught the game would be over, and the only way they could gather information regarding the conditions to awaken the Empress would be –

- Plum cried out once again as she was worried about these two things.

Although in reaction to this, Sora fearlessly allowed three characters from his wrist to disappear to form「Word Spirits」.

And as he was about to be hit by the「Binding Light」, what happened instead was…

What happened was – the Flügel that shot out the light had collapsed.

While the ones that had left the passage as well and had fired the lights coming at them collapsed as well.

Leaving no exceptions – everyone was standing on the cubes.

- They couldn't shoot without being on the ground, so – there was no need to evade.

Amongst the oncoming beams of light, Sora climbed onto the exit of the passageway.

He threw the 「Word Spirits」 he formed onto the ground with all his might – and yelled.

"-「Flip」-!!"[14]

- After a short delay –

Ignoring all the laws of the physical plane, suddenly –

- Avant Heim's entire horizon 「Flipped over」.

""""Aaaaaaahahhh-!?""""

Not only Plum, but the Flügel who had fired the 「Binding Lights」 as well – even the people watching from afar, Jibril yelled out in surprise.

What would happen if the entire arena (Avant Heim) were to flip over?

Everything in the skies - the 「Binding Lights」 moving about in the air and the Flügel there would remain the same.

Even their high-pitched yells followed the Doppler Effect[15], and the ones that stood on the arena – the people on the floor – which were the Flügel, Sora and Shiro.

- Their positions were swapped and reversed.

""""Yaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!""""

"Even the ones that fired the lights won't be able to evade them since they'll appear in front of them in an instant!"

Sora spoke while smiling, and only Shiro saw the corner of his mouth curl up ever so slightly.

「-Spin Avant Heim」 …

If they didn't spin it from the position they did, the light would merely come over in a different direction.

Sora's smile was that of a gambler who had just won an extremely risky hand – although if the 「Binding Light」 as Jibril said it would –

"- Shiro!!"

Her brother called upon her without hesitation, and Shiro having immediately understood his intentions, replied:

"…Twenty-five characters…!"

Yes - the 「Binding Light」 did work as Jibril had explained.

- It captures its target, and pulls it back to the source of the shot, however if the position of the source is reversed!

"Aaaaaahhhhh!"

"W-wait a minute, eek~~!!"

- The massive amounts of Flügel were pulled over to Sora and Shiro.

"It's all up to you, Shiro!!"

- All this was in accordance to Sora's plan – and it was a risk they could only take once.

From the 「Thirty-eight」 Flügel they dragged over – they acquired twenty-five characters.

タ（ta）ホ（ho）シ（si）テ（te）キ（ki）メ（me）ヤ（ya）ル（ru）エ（e）イ（i）モ（mo）ツ（tsu）ヘ（he）レ（re）ヨ（yo）ネ（ne）セ（se）ニ（ni）フ（hu）ノ（no）ム（mu）シ（n）ウ（u）リ（ri）コ（ko）-But…

"…B-but, Nii!"

Shiro called out in confusion.

- It was a stunning result, as thirty-eight Flügel were pulled over in various positions.
However only Shiro knew the positions of the words, not considering the time limit.

In such a short period of time, to collect characters from twenty-five people, for one person alone it would be – although Sora immediately smiled and –

“First we need to consider the ratings!「Steam[16]」!!”

Billows of steam began covering the area extremely quickly, covering all the Flügel that had been drawn there.

After which – Sora smiled from cheek to cheek, and used another「Word Spirit」.

He splashed it at everyone in front of him – Shiro still didn't bother reading her brother's actions, and she had her eyes half open.
At the same time, Sora and Shiro flapped their wings mightily and flew away as fast as they could – and then –

“- Since everything's in place -「Naked[17]」!!”

The Flügel that were jumbled and tied together in various positions by the「Binding Light」…
- Their clothes all vanished at once, thus Sora could now tell where the positions of the characters were.

Sora had an expression of – absolute glee on his face – and he closed his eyes and said:

“Ah, I can see it, Shiro, I can see so many things!!”

“…Nii take the left, Shiro… the right.”

“Ah! Leave it to me, my sister! Hahahahahah! Roar, my left hand!”

The sister glanced at him with a gaze so cold that even the atoms around hit absolute zero temperatures, while the brother had a gaze so fiery that the magnetic fields around them would evaporate.
- If the temperature of people's gazes could cause effect, the entire planet would probably be engulfed in a typhoon.

But luckily –

“Ah!”

“Yah!”

- The only thing the scene was engulfed with was the chorus of twenty-five Flügel's moans.

Although he wanted to continue listening to that chorus, Sora and Shiro could only pass through them quickly and leave them behind.
After which they accelerated up high into the skies once again.

“- How should I put it, your actions were so fast that even I was amazed.”

“Heheheh, you can compliment me more, Plum! Heheheh.”

“…Nii, your pervertedness is as long as a parsec[18]…”

“Did I just get scolded with an astronomical unit!? Your brother worked very hard for all this!!”

- Sora had collected twelve characters, and Shiro thirteen.

Also, Sora had enjoyed some unnecessary skin-on-skin contact and had made some disgusting noises, to which Shiro scolded him outright.

The brother was rather upset at the sister scolding him with a unit that represented about 3.26 light years, however Shiro didn't stop there.

“…Nii,「Steam」and「Naked」…you wasted…three characters…”

“Hey, my dear younger sister, stop fooling around, how was that a waste? Imposible.”

Sora smiled a smile so exaggerated even an American would be proud, and he rebutted Shiro's words:

“There were three glorious aims to that action: collecting the characters; preventing them from chasing us again since they will now have an aversion to flying naked; and most importantly –“

Sora stopped for a while – and continued with an incredibly solemn expression…

He declared determinedly:

"It was the choice of Steins;Gate[19]."

"…More like the Gate of Nii's desires…"

Shiro continued to comment in an icily cold tone, while Plum detected presences behind them and she yelled out:

"Waaaaahahh~~ they're coming at us from behind without shame!!"

"What~!? I didn't think of that!! ...They're coming from in front too, Shiro?"

"…No words."

Shiro replied somewhat unpleased, as multiple completely naked Flügel who had escaped the binding lights as well as three others were approaching from the back and front respectively.

Sora intentionally faced the oncoming Flügel, prepared his camera and constructed a 「Word Spirit」.

After which the two gracefully dodged their outstretched hands – and threw the 「Word Spirit」 over.

"-「Fondle breasts[20]」"… they yelled.

After which they did a backflip in the air, and Sora used his wing to cover Shiro's eyes and activated his camera.

"Now these people will help me trip up our pursuers…phew…"

The clothes-wearing Flügel began to fondle the breasts of the naked Flügel, slowing down their pace.

"Phew – I finally saw Nirvana with my very own eyes… what a glorious sight, but sadly it's at night so I wonder whether the camera did get those shots?"

"…I'm speechless to the point where I don't know whether to feel awed by Sora-dono anymore…"

Part 10

- The Masters who were dancing about in the skies appeared so cheerful and energetic, and they could even smile in the face of danger.

However looking at those shadows projected in the night sky, Azrael still couldn't seem to understand.

"-…"

Jibril didn't know how many times she had sighed at Azrael who merely had her brow furrowed in confusion.

…At this rate the Masters would win – although there would be no meaning in that.

Azrael would betray the Masters' expectations without knowing anything -!

"…Senpai, why can't you just understand…"

"-…"

"You want to order everyone to commit suicide just like that? To die just because of you?"

Azrael still couldn't understand the heavy undertones of worry within Jibril's voice.

- Why should the Flügel fear death?

The Flügel shouldn't even possess that emotion.

And she wasn't afraid of her own death – she was afraid of those brats?

"You saw the Masters' faces, those children's faces, and you still don't understand a thing? If you seal those children's potential just because of your own stupidity and stubbornness, and waste this six thousand years –"

- Please, please understand.

"The one that wasted these six thousand years – is you!!"

Tears were almost appearing in Jibril's eyes, and her voice sounded as if she was trying her hardest to squeeze it out.

But Azrael still couldn't understand, what was it that she didn't understand? What is it? What is it…!

- …

"Ugh~ I can't catch them!!"

"Go around the other way and surround them! Fire the binding magic in a cross shape! As long as we make them waste their words, we have a chance!"

"Huh~? But they'll still avoid it anyway."

"Just try it, if we can't we'll just think of another way, let's go!"

The Flügel began dancing about in the air after a brief discussion, and for some reason –

On their faces were pure, unadultered – smiles.

-…What made them so happy?

Sora and Shiro once again spiralled downwards as they realized they were firing at them in a cross shape, and avoided the shots entirely as expected.

"Really, look, they did dodge it."

"Heh, so let's fire at them simultaneously from above and below! Everyone scatter and fire at my signal!"

"Understood!!"

-…What made them so happy?

How could they possibly smile like that while chasing an enemy they couldn't beat?

- …

Azrael seemed frustrated at herself for not understanding, while Jibril spoke softly to her:

"Senpai, do you remember my battle record?

"…I remember all of it-nyan, I remember everything my cute little sister has done."

She bent her head down and appeared to look into the horizon – somewhere that wasn't where she was – and smiled with a faraway gaze.

"Gigants, you helped to take down nineteen of them, and killed one of them by yourself; and the Dragonias, you helped to take down three of them, and killed one of them by yourself -!"

- The severed heads of the Dragonias that were hanging on the humongous tree on the outskirts of the city were Jibril's trophies.

And that skull was to celebrate her results, Azrael had put it there intentionally – it was a decoration, and –

"Phantasma, you helped to kill three – and killed one by yourself, nyan."

Just the same, Jibril was the only one that had managed to kill a Phantasma alone.

Azrael smiled while recalling their past – that smile had nothing sinister to it, nor was it fake.

"The final unit had had such amazing results in combat merely throughout two hundred and forty-five campaigns, and survived…how could I possibly forget?"

…That was in the distant past, where all their cherished memories were – when they still had a future.

Seeing Azrael talking about their past with a pure smile on her face, Jibril tipped her head slightly and asked:

"…So, do you remember how many times I got injured so badly that I needed emergency spell repair?"

"A hundred and forty-six times, nyan."

Her reply was instant.

Jibril had always returned from the brink of death, which worried her to no end.

"…And all those were caused by your solo campaigns-nyan…"

- The Gigants, Dragonias and Phantasma – she had killed one of each.

Jibril had killed three members of high-ranking species alone.

Although the times she had failed to do so were twenty-nine times more than that.

And what that signified – why couldn't she just understand, Jibril clenched her jaw.

"So – do you know why I insisted on campaigning solo all the time?"

- That was the final hint, and Jibril's tone carried a strong indication to this.

Amongst her determined tone, there were slight dashes of fear of betrayal and anticipation.

However… Azrael could only shake her head.

"…To be honest, I've never understood Jii-chan's actions, and speaking of which –"

"Yes, speaking of which they were unconquerable enemies."

- Yes, they were all high-ranking beings that they could never hope to conquer alone.

Because when the Flügel were created, they were never given that ability.

- This was the last chance, if she still couldn't understand –

"That's why – I wanted to break that mind-set."

--….

"…I don't understand, nyan, why is that so-nyan? What did Jii-chan see in those two-nyan?"

"…"

Jibril was speechless.

- It was as though she was saying she had given up all her anticipation.

- If she could understand it, it was impossible that others couldn't – that thought slowly crumbled.

And her heart bled for Azrael, harder than she could bear, and –

"…Jii-chan, Jii-chan is special-nyan…"

"…?"

"Jii-chan doesn't know it, but Artosh-sama gave Jii-chan a 「Special Ability」, so what Jii-chan understands, everyone else might not-nyan."

"…"

Jibril remained silent, while Azrael spoke as though a confession:

"I want to know the 「Answer」 as well, I don't want everything to end like this!! If that happens, what would these six thousand years have been to us!? But I just don't understand – I'm at my limit, I just can't lie to myself any more-nyan!!"

- The first unit, Azrael.

Being the first Flügel to have been created, she was created by Artosh in search of 「Perfection」.

She didn't possess the ability to cry, but maybe because they were the only two there…

Azrael cried out in an almost pleading fashion, and her first truly truthful words carried an almost moist undertone to them.

- Someone please tell me.

- What are we living for?

- Why do we survive?

- What are we searching for?

- What do we have to find to prove that we have truly lived – please tell me.

Jibril looked at her speechlessly.

- However she intentionally spoke in an icily cold tone, as if pushing her away heartlessly.

- Just like that, she spoke words that her Masters would probably use.

"…That's how you're making use of me – making use of your limits as an excuse."

"-------!!"

"No matter you or me, the ones that survived are all losers, and we have lived as losers for six thousand years."

Azrael bent her head low, and her fists were clenched tight.

"We didn't learn anything the entire time, and it's not because we're special – it was because of your laziness."

Jibril clenched her fists as well.

…She suddenly recalled, although she had been in multiple near-death situations before, she had never felt more tense.

She told herself, get your fake expression right, don't tremble your voice, and don't shift your gaze.

She forcefully tied down the Spirits that made up her body, and manipulated them.

- Could she do it? That uneasy thought flashed past her mind, but she shook her head in denial.

It wasn't a matter of whether or not she could do it, but she had to do it – that was what she had learned.

She absorbed what she had learnt from her Masters, then acted upon what she had learnt from them.

- Jibril wasn't used to it.

She decided to make a gamble – and that was…

(Masters, I will follow you to the very bitter end, so please forgive Jibril's incompetence.)

She thought to herself, and with her final silver of anticipation – she…

(So please allow me to continue believing in what the Masters have all this time.)

Jibril imitated the most – underestimating expression she could muster.

"For this 「 Cowardly, utterly weak」 you, I have only disgust from the bottom of my heart – Azrael (trash)."

Throughout her six thousand, four hundred and seventh years of her life, it was the first time – she told a lie.

…

…Suddenly…

Azrael's face suddenly became devoid of all expression, and she spoke weakly, almost exhaustedly.

"…Forget it-nyan."

In an instant – the skies and the earth began to shake.

Chapter 3: Learn

Part 1

(…I was wrong.)

How could she not have expected this – she had went out to get groceries to prepare sashimi as they had promised, and as Steph brought Izuna to town, she felt extreme guilt at her carelessness.

Fear, hateful gazes, scornful insults – those negative feelings rained down on Izuna who was walking alongside Steph.

She couldn't possibly not have noticed them with her Werebeast senses.

(Although we are a 「 Federation」 , it really isn't all that easy to accept different races, but still…)

She had a very clear image of it in her mind.

It was true that Izuna – the Werebeasts were conquerors and tyrants to the Elkians.

However that was only because of the 「 Ten Pledges」 .

The troubles and suffering of the Imanity all stemmed from the fact that they had lost in a game.

If it was hatred towards an end result that both parties had agreed with, it meant they were just being sore losers –

"Why doesn't Steph-kou hate Izuna, des?"

"Huh -?"

"…Izuna was the one that took away your continent, des; so it should be perfectly logical for you to hate me, des; but Izuna caused your grandfather to be called a foolish king as well, des; so why don't you hate me, des?"

Izuna looked up at Steph and asked, and Steph's hand in hers momentarily froze.

How could she be so rude – Steph felt angered at her own insensitivity.

Izuna was too smart.

She had faced off against Sora and Shiro, with the continent – the fates of the Imanity and the Werebeasts on her back, with such responsibilities on her.

- She couldn't possibly have read nothing about it in the late king's library.

The effects her actions could have on the Imanity, and how she would be treated after that, she had already predicted and come to terms with those, and the only one who didn't realize it –

(It's just me again…)

Looking back, since Steph had woken up – which meant right after Izuna had learnt the Imanity language, she had covered Steph with a coat as she slept, which was a rather large change in her attitude.

Why didn't she realize why her attitude had changed – Steph got angry at herself once again, although she shook her head upon looking at the young girl's uneasy gaze.

Since she was asked a question – she had the obligation to answer.

Walking on the streets like this, facing all those hateful gazes like this.

Izuna might begin to wonder whether Steph might hate her as well – she needed to sweep away those unimaginable thoughts from her head.

(Yes…that's right, normally speaking…)

If they were angry at the nobles that had belittled Steph's beloved grandfather, must they hate those that had been the cause of it, the Eastern Federation – Steph didn't know. And although she didn't know why – she could confirm positively that it wasn't like that.

Suddenly, the corner of Steph's mouth curled up in a smile.

"Why? I don't know either♪"

"Is Steph-kou an idiot, des."

"Heh, maybe, but – I don't think it's that way."

Steph said this while looking into Izuna's large eyes.

- She was a young black-haired girl with stunningly obvious ears and a tail that was even younger than Shiro.

She had faced off at an almost equal standard against 『 』 , with the orders of the third largest nation in the world on her back – she had unlimited potential.

She was smart, diligent, pure and obedient, and she had a stunning amount of maturity and intelligence as well.

Steph smiled cheerfully at that girl, and smiled even wider.

"Because Izuna is a good kid, and you're cute as well."

Steph spoke her mind, thinking that was the simplest way to express her feelings.

Izuna widened her eyes in shock, after which her hair stood on end and she averted her gaze expressionlessly.

She bent her head low, not allowing Steph to see her face and spoke weakly:

"Steph-kou's such an idiot, des."

- Even though she said this, she clutched Steph's hand somewhat tighter.

Steph smiled somewhat bitterly at Izuna's easily readable attitude, and just as she was about to step forward once more –

"Ah~ it's Izuna!"

The two turned around at the sound of that loud roar.

Multiple figures cut through the crowd, and rushed in their direction – those were young kids.

"W-what -!?"

As Steph was frozen momentarily in shock, the kids surrounded them.

After which they began cheering loudly.

"It's Izuna! How awesome! It's her in person!"

"Hey, Izuna, let's have a showdown! You're really strong right?"

"You idiots, you stupid idiots, you need adults to come along, you bald monkey!"

"Who are you people…des?"

Izuna asked confusedly as she was being overwhelmed by the crowd of children.

As Steph was considering how to stop those kids – all of a sudden, she noticed an animal ear and a tail in the crowd – Werebeasts were amongst them, and she hurriedly asked:

"What are you all doing?"

"We're playing! Together!"

One of the kids – a young girl with a pair of fox-like ears replied as though she was just learning to speak.

"Are you…friends? With the Werebeast kids as well?"

"Of course!"

Steph asked immediately in confusion, while the fox-eared girl asked confusedly with her head slightly tilted as well.

And the Imanity boy beside her said happily:

"- We became friends through playing games!"

Upon hearing this simple yet pure sentence…

Steph felt inexplicably emotional.

In that time, the kids surrounding Izuna were still blabbering on.

"Let's have a showdown, I definitely~ won't lose to you!"

"…I'm hungry, des. We're going to buy fish, des. I'm very busy, des."

Izuna looked impatiently at the young boy that was grabbing on her clothes and was demanding her to play a game with him and said –

"…I'll destroy you painfully next time, des."

Izuna's mouth curled up in a smile.

That especially obnoxious boy punched his fist into the air and cheered upon hearing that.

"That's great! So it's a promise! Izuna! You better follow it!"

"I already said we need adults as well, you bunch of idiots! – Izuna-sama, I apologize."

Just like that, the bunch of kids disappeared just as swiftly as they had come.

Even after all the commotion had subsided, the raging emotions within Steph had not, and remained like ashes of a hearth fire.

"Heh…the answer turned out to be just like that…"

…The atmosphere around them had turned into that of confusion without them realizing it.

It may be too early…

But in the near future, when those kids turned into adults… the fact that the races used to hate each other would probably be treated as a joke.

Steph smiled with those hopes residing within her.

"It's not very often that we get to play games – I'm sure it'll be more fun that way."

"…Steph-kou, you aren't an idiot after all, des. You're probably pretty smart, des."

Steph appeared as if she had just seen a god after hearing those words.

"Ah, Izuna! You're the only one that doesn't call me an idiot!!"

"…But you act like one, des."

Izuna smiled a bitter smile as Steph hugged her tearfully.

- The world would change, was changing, and would continue to change.

If it didn't feel like it was changing – that would mean – you're just not paying attention –

Part 2

The world around them had changed completely.

"Waaaaaahhh, what is this!?"

Sora and others that were flying about in the night sky yelled as they plummeted from the impact of the explosion and the strong winds.

But compared to that – the one that was screaming the loudest among them at that turn of events was Plum.

"W-what is going on!? This Spirit power – it's impossible even for the Flügel!?"

The burst of energy was so strong that even Plum could feel it behind the guise of her scarf, and she shivered in fear.

If it was someone who could use magic, he would feel abnormal upon seeing that – this force that shook the earth, this force that was from another dimension entirely, bent the world to its desires with its power, switching about the scenery forcefully – no, it repainted it entirely.

"Ah~ Plum, is the situation that bad?"

They didn't restrict 「Changing the stage」 …Sora asked with that in mind, while Plum replied with a panicked moan:

"It's not just bad -!! T-this power is from an Old Dei, if not –"

As Plum was halfway through her sentence – she suddenly stopped as she remembered where they were flying over.

- The Phantasma that were ranked second among the 「Sixteen Races」 - Avant Heim…

"…I don't understand, we can't comprehend it."

- Azrael was floating in thin air.

On her face was no longer that angelic, perfect – overly perfect smile.

It didn't even have that sensation of 「Impending death」 one would experience when being stared at by a Flügel…no…

Sora felt a trickle of cold sweat run down his body, and he smiled bitterly, for he was facing an overly powerful force – he couldn't even feel anything.

A power beyond comprehension and imagination, a power that made Sora and Shiro's skin riddle with goosebumps.

The existence that had Azrael's appearance – spoke slowly:

"「Final Unit」 - we cannot understand what kind of ideals you all possess."

She then spoke in a hollow, emotionless voice:

"- Thus, we bequest of you to tell us the answer directly."

「The existence」 declared to them as the scenery finally settled down. Sora and Shiro were speechless at this turn of events.

The broken skies were dyed blood-red, the swirling sands had reached even the stratosphere, and the cracked soil stretched across the horizon.

The skies and earth were all cracked, the seas were dry – everywhere was full of death.

Countless splinters of rocks floated around them – those were the remains of the earth.

The Flügel that had participated in the game, and the countless battleships that emitted a menacing aura all appeared like a weirdly shaped fleet of airships –

"W-what exactly is this?"

Sora asked as he recovered from his shock, however neither Shiro nor Plum were able to answer.

The Flügel that were still flying about in the air – they had pained expressions on their faces, seemingly familiar with this emotionally scarring scene unfolding before them.

- Six thousand years ago – which was the final stages of the 「Great War」 .

The Old Deus that had created the Flügel collected the combined energy of the 「Airstrikes」 of the Flügel, and unleashed a single blow.

And that blow that crushed the earth, split the skies and even destroyed planets and stars –it was a truly 「Divine Strike」 .

They were standing in the very aftermath of that strike, and Azrael spoke with the apocalypse behind her:

"- Previously we fought, and we lost."

And behind that apocalyptic world – a huge piece of sinister-looking land appeared.

Could it be that this was – Avant Heim's appearance before the 「Great War」 .

That slab of land looked just like a floating whale – and this flying fortress was not made of cubes, instead it was riddled with countless cannons and it had a pair of blue eyes that were filled with killing intent.

“- Our Master released his most powerful strike – however it was 「Reflected back at him」, and we were completely annihilated, which was how our Master died.”

- What had changed Jibril?

“Why did we lose? Why did we lose our Master? Why did we survive? Why–“

- What had allowed her to discover the reason why they were living?

Plum frantically attempted to keep herself conscious when faced with this violent interrogation –

“Why did we survive, as empty weapons of a dead Master? Answer me–“

“”-「野砲（ヤホウ yahou)」-“” [21]

A bolt of light pierced through Azrael's chest.

In an instant, a glow of light lit up the evening, and the immense explosion that came slightly after made even the atmosphere tremble.

“…Huh?”

Plum croaked dumbly, and the reply –

“You! Talk! Too! Much! Dialogues must be kept within forty words, or else you have to include a setting to skip the text!”

“…Don't underestimate…the impatience of...an STG player…” [22]

Sora and Shiro blurted impatiently –

When exactly had they landed on the ground and combined their 「Word Spirits」 - the two were clutching onto a metal tube.

Plum didn't know…no, more correctly speaking she wasn't looking at them.

The two had used three characters to materialize a five-millimetre Howitzer which spat fire and released a bullet which travelled at a speed even greater than the speed of sound, piercing through Azrael, after which the fifteen pounds of Composition B explosives contained within it blew her body to bits with an explosion that propelled the pieces at eight thousand miles per second, which then turned into smoke and scattered– [23]

“- Huh~~ WHAT ARE YOU DOINGGGGG!?”

Plum cried out as she realized what had just happened, while the two glared at her and replied: “Skipping dialogue.”

“…That guy looks like a prick…disgusting…”

“D-d-do you know who that was? That's–“

“Of course, that was Azrael – and the Phantasma Avant Heim right?”

“…H-huh?”

Sora sighed impatiently, shook his head and continued:

“Azrael is different from the rest of the Flügel, she has horns, so I'm guessing that's why – essentially speaking she is the full representative of the Phantasma Avant Heim as well, although I don't quite know the full details.”

“…Which means…Azrael is the same as…a Phantasma…”

The two had figured out the situation completely unlike Plum, and spoke in a rather bored fashion:

“…Jibril said it earlier, the Phantasma Avant Heim is an entirely different world.”

Sora recalled her explanation she made as they arrived, and continued:

“Changing the scenery means changing the entire world, but if it's an independent world of its own, I don't think it can affect the outside world entirely. Which means – it changed its own world (within Avant Heim), but when that happened she who should have been 「On top of」 Avant Heim appeared in front of us – which is to say, that was an illusion.”

- The fact that they were able to deal damage to her proved that she was an illusion, as if she was the real thing the 「Ten Pledges」 would prevent them from touching her.

"…Alright…Plum…here's the question…"

Why do they look so happy? Plum didn't seem to understand.

Sora and Shiro were truly overjoyed, while Sora continued:

"The stage just changed drastically, a scene that looks like some sort of fortress for a final weapon appeared in front of us, and we just listened through some long final boss-like speech – and among the 「Hour」 allocated for the game there is only -?"

"…Nine minutes and forty-four seconds left."

"What could this possibly mean? You may now answer!"

- Plum didn't have the knowledge Sora and Shiro possessed from their world, so this was a rather demanding question for her.

But – as she saw the approaching thing.

Plum with an expression of despair on her face, by chance – spoke the 「Correct answer」.

"…Does it mean it's The End?"

"Huh? I'd never thought you'd guess it."

The huge, violent 「Binding Curtain」 fired at Avant Heim…

Sora and Shiro clutched each other's hands and said with a smile:

"Basically it's the 「Final Stage」 - the ending's near!"

"…Climactic scene…great performance…♪"

The two stamped on the ground, flapped their wings, left the huge burst of noise generated from their 「Acceleration」 behind them, then smiled as they flew towards the curtain of binding lights.

"HOW CAN YOU STILL BE LAUGHING IN A SITUATION LIKE THISSSSSSS!!"

They sped forward at extreme speeds towards the curtain of light that spread across Avant Heim.

- Their numbers were large, but the lights didn't have the tracking ability that the 「Binding Light」 fired by the rest of the Flügel had, so it was a curtain that merely relied on its numbers and speed to crush its opponents – the two smiled bitterly.

"Shiro, have you figured out the pattern of the curtain?"

"…Almost there…Nii?"

"You know it right? I'm the kind that - 「Dodges by pure passion」!"

Sora flapped his wing once more, while Shiro flapped according to his beat without faltering.

They were like aerial dancers, weaving through the countless approaching rays of light while whistling a tune, proceeding naturally –

"Compared to Touhou this really makes me wanna yawn, can we really rely on Jibril?" [24]

"…If this is what the final boss is like…we won't…the Flügel…are harder to deal with."

They nimbly dodged the curtains of light with actions Plum couldn't comprehend.

Sora and Shiro could even look down at their hands to make sure as they dodged the lights.

"…Total of 「Forty-six characters」."

"…We've collected 「Forty characters」…"

"We've used 「Twenty-two」?"

The characters floating on Sora's wrist were - タ (ta) シ (si) テ (te) キ (ki) ル (ru) エ (e) イ (i) ツ (tsu) ヘ (he) -

The characters floating on Shiro's wrist were - レ (re) ヨ (yo) セ (se) ニ (ni) フ (fu) ソ (no) シ (n) リ (ri) コ (ko) -

They were stocked up well enough, but Sora said instead:

"Hmm~ ハ (ha) 、コ (ko) 、ミ (mi) 、ヲ (wo) 、チ (chi) 、ヒ (hi) ...we haven't got these six ones."

"...But we have...the trump."

Shiro indicated that was more than enough.

"- I've said it before, I've figured out the 「 Word Spirit」 I'm going to use on her, so I'm short of three."

"...Under these circumstances...collecting characters is...impossible..."

The fact that they could dodge and weave about the rain of light was already beyond Plum's comprehension.

But if they were to deal with the Flügel under these circumstances, it would probably be too impossible for even them.

"...We can't go on like this, Shiro, I'm sorry, but we'll have to use the trump."

"...Nii, how many characters will you need?"

"Fourteen."

Shiro widened her eyes, which was a rare sight, and she examined her brother's face closely as though to read his intentions.

"Fourteen, that's the least amount of letters we need, however we lack three of them."

However on Sora's face – was an expression of pure seriousness.

- A 「 Word Spirit」 that needed fourteen characters?

The 「 Trump」 that Shiro mentioned – it was probably a 「 Word Spirit」 that could tide them through any disaster.

Although it could only be used once – it really should be used as a last resort. However –

"...Mm, I understand..."

Since her brother said he 「 Needed」 it, it meant that 「 They needed it no matter the risk」 , so Shiro nodded her head in agreement.

Since she herself had no way to decipher her brother's true intentions, which meant her brother was correct – that was all there was to it - !

- Sora's left hand and Shiro's right hand, the two intertwined hands – four characters slid and fell off those hands.

After which – Sora arranged them and formed a 「 Word Spirit」 .

He raised his hand high, and –

"-「 切 断 (セ ツ ダ ン setsudan) 」 - !!" (TL note: Cut, split open)

He violently swung his arm horizontally – and in an instant...

The infinite curtains of light that were hovering over Avant Heim's airspace were suddenly cut in half as if by an invisible sword.

- Making imagination reality was a rule of this game, which was the 「 Word Spirits」 .

「 Barrier」 and 「 Cut」 were two words that could easily be made reality as long as they were spelled out.

An omnipotent word that could attack, defend, and even both, one that could deal with all possible situations – that was their trump.

Also the importance and usefulness of the letter「ン (n)」 in word games like these was common knowledge.

The consequences brought about by them being forced to use that omnipotent「Word Spirit」 - according to Sora's plans –

- Everything before him was just like a bad joke -「Split into half」.

Space, scenery, everything including Avant Heim itself was sliced into half – even the cannons.

- After that? Just as Plum was about to ask, Sora and Shiro – decelerated.

"- Huh!?"

Plum cried out in surprise, as amongst the crumbling landscape and the interrupted curtains, the Flügel were approaching.

"…Nii…coming."

"…Eighteen – more than I thought, how many of them have characters on them?"

"…Six…all present…but…"

- The real question was how would they collect all of them?

Since they had used cut earlier, they had only「Fourteen characters」 left; and according to what Sora had said, the last「Fourteen」 had already been reserved.

He had also said, among the「Six」 they had not collected,「Three」 were important.

Even if they did collect them all, they could only use three more, and now all they could use on them were「Three」.

"- Alright, this is our final bet, let's go, Shiro!"

As they said this, the two did a backflip and landed in a parrying stance – facing the oncoming Flügel –

They were just about to flap their wings, but –

"- H-huh?"

Plum cried in surprise, no, Sora and Shiro felt the same way as well.

Because the oncoming Flügel, just before Sora and Shiro – they stopped.

One of their numbers bowed respectfully towards them just as Jibril had when they had defeated her.

"The two of you need this one right?"

…As she said this, her palm was cupping the「ハ (ha)」 inscribed on her chest.

As though in imitation, five more that had characters on them revealed them as well.

Sora and Shiro felt confused as they didn't understand their intentions, while the Flügel simply smiled and said:

"Because we've already had a lot of fun spectating –"

"To be honest it's really disappointing that we won't get the handshake, signature, date and sleepover vouchers though~!"

"But since we've got the chance to play games with you both, we're all content ♪"

"- So, please."

They heard the last one say –

"We'll leave Azrael-neesan to you, in the near future – our future Masters."

- Finally…

Sora and Shiro understood the trap Jibril had laid within the game.

Both of them stretched out their hands towards the characters while repressing the urge to laugh out loud.

"…Hahah, Jibril's got a few tricks up her sleeve now!"

"…Jibril…omega good job…♪"

Sora and Shiro said teasingly, and touched the final six characters.

"…U-um, what's going on here?"

Plum asked, being the only one not understanding the situation, while the Flügel laughed and replied.

"Did you forget, little bug, that we're –"

"We are the Flügel, and although we are under the command of our sister Azrael."

"But more than that we are huge fans of Sora-sama and Shiro-sama!"

They were all smiles – beating Plum down mercilessly with their words.

Sora and Shiro smiled bitterly as they sent them off, and once again – flapped their wings and accelerated.

They flew towards the split open Avant Heim – towards the place where Azrael was.

Part 3

"…It appears others have understood as well…now are you still going to call me special?"

Jibril said with a bitter smile.

Azrael remained emotionless, although underneath that mask was torment and bitterness.

- What was that? What just happened? I don't understand at all.

Azrael continued to ponder the scene that had just occurred in front of her.

Amongst the slowly crumbling Avant Heim, the two were gracefully dodging the debris.

They were heading directly straight – at them, as though they knew her exact position!

No, they did know! They had used a cannon to dispel her illusion, then cross-referenced the 「Original landscape」 with this broken and crumbling land, then deduced her and Jibril's original positions, assuming they didn't move – no, they were sure of it!

- A bitter memory flashed through Azrael's mind upon realizing that.

Artosh was killed in the same fashion back then.

All his defenses were overcome, all his actions were saw through, all his barricades and obstacles were slipped past by the enemy, and in the end – her Master was murdered.

Why did we lose? Why did we survive! Why are we still alive!?

…….

"WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!"

"Plum! You're being too noisy!!"

As Avant Heim slowly crumbled around them, they weaved about the countless debris faster than the speed of sound.

If they were to miscalculate even the slightest, they would die – under those circumstances, the two flew at breakneck speeds, causing Plum to cry out.

"AAAAAH-ARE YOU TWO CRAZY-AAHHHHHHHHH!!"

"IM TIRED OF HEARING THAT LINE! SHIRO!!"

The scenery in front of them crumbled, countless cubes fell, tunnels were blocked, and turning around was impossible – at this rate they would crash.

"WAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!"

Plum cried out once again, while Shiro calmly assembled a 「Word Spirit」 beside her.

"-「≒二 (mini)」 …"

Eighteen characters remained.

The「Word Spirit」 activated as it came into contact with one of the cubes in front of them.

One of the cubes shrunk, creating a small gap, but the crack was just too small for two to fit through –

Sora who was assembling a「Word Spirit」 at the same time, immediately pointed at the hole and yelled:

"-「へル (heru)」!!"[25]

- Sixteen characters left.

The two continued soaring after passing through that gap as small as a pinhole.

As Plum was beginning to be astonished by their astounding adaptability, Sora suddenly said:

"Plum, could you stick out your teeth for a sec?"

"No! I have a bad feeling about this, so no!!"

"Really? How disappointing – I wanted to give you some blood –"

"Sorry, I was wrong! I will place my teeth on Sora-sama's shoulder, you'll be able to tell from the sensation!!"

"-「血 (チ chi)」"[26]

- Fifteen characters left.

The blood flowed out from his uncut fingertips, dripping onto Plum's teeth.

Plum managed to absorb blood without even biting with her lips.

"Oh, what is this stuff!? This thick, rich, sweet yet bitter texture and a smooth, refreshing tone, the bewitching sensation of a soul is flowing through my body! If a comparison needs to be made, it's like a turtle shedding tears after giving birth under a moonlight night♥"

- Sora smiled bitterly as Plum began yelling out some rather incomprehensible food review.

"Are you energized yet?"

"Of course~! My strength is coursing through me! Now I feel like I can do anything!"

Plum – no, huge amounts of flowers began blooming on the scarf, and floated about in the air.

Sora and Shiro smiled evilly at her cries of joy.

"Isn't that great, so –"

"…You can do…anything right…"

"- Yeah…that's what I thought as well…"

Part 4

Six thousand years ago – Artosh was being conquered.

The Flügel were desperate at this unbelievable yet inarguably true turn of events.

They were god-killers created by Artosh – a sword to eliminate other races.

They would give the throne of the One True God to Artosh – a sword for this very purpose.

But as they saw their Master murdered in front of them, his lifeless body with no purpose of existence, the one and only sword lost its meaning to live.

They were a sword that was always swung by the command of others, so they never needed to make any decisions, although then – questions surfaced.

The race created by Artosh and its acolytes had come up with a conclusion in their desperation – which was to stop thinking.

She did not know who started it, but she had concentrated all her strength – and pierced through her own body.

They were a tool created to fight for the throne of the One True God, and since their Master whom they would give it to was gone, the tool had no reason to exist.

As she saw her sisters piercing themselves through one by one, Azrael – the first unit, in pure desperation, told a lie.

No, to be precise, it wasn't a lie.

It was just that as she witnessed her sisters piercing themselves through and losing the lights in their eyes, she couldn't bear to tell them.

- The orders of the Master were not yet completed.

It was impossible, but if, just if, he were to fall in combat – you must replace me and find out why I, the god of war, fell to an unknown power – that was the final order of the Master.

- It was a command given to Azrael alone – an order.

However she lied and said it was an order for all Flügel, after which she continued:

- After we attain this goal, the final order of the Master would be complete.

- So when that time comes please let me decide whether or not we are still of use.

…It was a lie of convenience.

And despite this – the Flügel began pursuing the 「Unknown」 that had defeated their Master.

At the same time as the war ended, they had gathered all their knowledge, as though they were going to transform all the unknowns in the world to their knowledge.

And as time passed, after six thousand years – they still had not found the answer.

Azrael had thought that if there was one person that would be able to find the answer, it would be Jibril.

Those were the Master's final words, the Final Unit is a special Unit.

But…

- I'm already…tired-nyan…

Part 5

Sora and Shiro reached the main hall where Azrael may have been.

…It was very dark, so Sora assembled and activated a 「Word Spirit」.

"-「ヒ (hi)」!"[27]

-Fourteen characters left, just nice.

Now they just had to use up the final fourteen, and they could finish the level with all forty-six perfectly used.

"But, we can't use any more 「Word Spirits」 until then…sorry, Shiro."

"…As long as it's Nii…if your judgement deems it…Shiro believes it."

Along with this line that made the brother unbelievably blissful - 「Light」 lit up the floor.

"- We searched for six thousand years, but we were still unable to find the 「Answer」."

There was an empty throne in the lit floor.

Azrael stood in front of it, and –

"Who is 'we' referring to? Aside from you, it seems that a lot of people have understood already!"

Sora said while looking over at Jibril who was sitting next to her with her eyes closed.

"Searching for a non-existent 「Answer」, I'm already tired of floating around without a purpose in this boring world."

That was Azrael – and the Phantasma Avant Heim located within her.

The two – no, a puppet and an illusion's confession.

"- If the 「Answer」 of the 「Final Unit」 is the same as our lies."

After a short pause, she looked at Sora and Shiro with a gaze of despair deeper than a crater and said:

"We will consider the cause for the Master's death to be 「Simple coincidence」 - and end the entire Flügel race."

"That would be a problem."

"…Jibril is…our…comrade."

The two replied nonchalantly in a relaxed manner, intentionally avoiding the subject while Sora slipped into thought.

"I see, so you guys crammed huge amounts of knowledge into your brains just for your so-called 「Answer」, I understand that part. To be honest, I don't understand the meaning and emotional drive behind that, but could you just let me ask one question?"

After which, in the exact same manner as he had rejected Azrael originally.

- He looked at her with eyes that clearly revealed he was truly bored with the subject matter, and said:

"…Have you ever relied on yourself to think and write anything -?"

"- !?"

Azrael widened her eyes, and beside her Jibril bent her head low. Jibril was holding onto a book that she treated as a bible, a book that garnered fans even in Avant Heim.

It was a hand-written – observational diary of Sora and Shiro – detailing the story of an incomplete future…

"But, I see now. If Shiro and I win, you will help to collect books for us, and if we lose we have to do an autograph session, but you've actually made other wagers beyond our knowledge other than this one. Jibril actually bet her life without discussing it through with us, so we'll have to punish her later, but–"

- Sora grabbed Shiro's arm tightly and spread his wing.

"Do you really not know why Jibril would agree to a bet like that?"

"- Because she believes that you can reveal an 「Answer」 we will be agreeable with–"

"Look, you idiot! You're really a huge idiot!! You even dare to call yourself a sister!?"

Sora yelled – his face filled with 「Pure rage」, and Sora – yelled again:

"- It's because she believes in you! She put her life on the line because she trusts that you, as a sister, would be able to understand!!"

…

……

Sora and Shiro focused their strength on their legs – assembling the final 「Word Spirit」.

"You can't even understand something as simple as this, and you dare to ask her to call yourself her sister!?"

"…It's just too hilarious…sleep-talk should be said when sleeping…and…!"

At the same time – the two kicked the ground and jumped.

- So fast.

It was a jump boosted by the acceleration 「Word Spirit」, and the two approached at an astonishing speed.

However Azrael had the power of a Phantasma within her, and to her – their movements were as slow as a snail.

"…I see, Jii-chan believed in me so much that she even bet her life…"

She realized that she had failed to understand something as simple as that, and she wasn't even able to deduce her intentions – so…

"- Yes, just end everything…"

Azrael said this as she kicked the ground and lifted off as well.

Within the hall where the ceiling was barely a few hundred feet high, the two would clash in but an instant as they were traveling at supersonic speeds.

- The ending was predetermined, Azrael would stretch out her hand and grab them, and everything would be over.

She really couldn't find the answer in the end, but someone found it – so – that's enough.

Just end in like this – this six thousand – meaningless years –

"AAAAAAHHHH IM SORRY IM SORRY PLEASE DONT KILL ME~~!"

…

"- What?"

Azrael bent her head down, and a loud cry echoed throughout the room as she grabbed onto her target.

She should have caught Sora and Shiro, but the one that was yelling was – that, um, what was her name again?

…Huh? Had she ever asked for her name in the first place?

- It was some Dhampir girl she didn't know.

- It was a 「Deception Spell」 - she understood this just a little bit too late.

The deceiving magic of the Dhampirs – it was a race-exclusive magic that could fool even the Elves or the Flügel at its maximum ability.

If it was just after absorbing a powerful Spirit – blood – maybe it might even fool an Old Deus?

But if so, Sora and Shiro's wings were – where did they go after they accelerated -!?

- Azrael's mind began racing.

She felt a presence swooping by her at a terrifying speed, and in an instant it was almost as if time had stopped.

Everything became slow-motion, and Azrael saw it.

Without Plum – without the scarf – the Imanity without their wings –

As they met briefly, Sora's fist landed upon Azrael's shoulder.

"-「縛りプレエデこの世を生きろ」-" [28]

-Zero characters left.

Azrael widened her eyes in shock, but what she was surprised at wasn't the 「Word Spirit」 she was hit by.

It was – the two who were flying at high speeds – managed to remove their wings and allow Plum to disguise herself!?

"「No restrictions on magic usage」 - right?"

After that brief exchange, Azrael heard a voice that should have been impossible for her to hear – as she turned around she confirmed that it was indeed Sora who said it.

But – at that sort of speeds, if a human body were to lose its wings – and hit the ground, they would definitely die –

A sentence that utterly stunned Azrael and yet answered all of her doubts rang in her ears.

"- Approximately sixty minutes…game…over."

- Without any clocks nor other tools.

Just as Shiro recited the numbers that existed only in her mind –

Jibril teleported, and gracefully…respectfully caught her two Masters.

That turn of events made Azrael feel extremely distant, while the 「Word Spirit」 previously placed on her activated.

「Forever burdened」. Within Azrael, even Avant Heim's strength was sealed as well.

As the colossal amount of energy that could rewrite worlds was released, the hall and even the landscape began shattering like glass.

Freefalling under such circumstances, Azrael's eyes remained wide in shock.

She didn't need to think hard to remember – no doubt, this feeling was the same as when Artosh – her Master was conquered – a true sensation of 「Fear」.

…She didn't understand.

There were too, too, too many things that she just couldn't understand.

Scary, how scary, how much do they actually know, they actually could make such a dangerous bet.

No matter how much I gather knowledge, make battle plans, how much I prepare, in the very bitter end it's still an unknown –

Within the darkness of all these variable elements, how could they – how could they possibly step on a silk wire like this without hesitation?

She had seen so many extraordinary things in quick succession.

The freefalling, continuously descending Azrael lost consciousness –

Part 6

In her dream, Azrael saw her Master Artosh's memories.

The everlasting chaos would only bring strength to the 「God of War」 Artosh.

The Old Deus that fed on battle hunger, hostility, hatred and blood – the God of War Artosh.

And now he and the splinters of his eighteen wings – the feathers (the Flügel) and his follower the Phantasma (Avant Heim), with such a small army, one god, one Phantasma, and one race – waged war on the entire world, and had achieved a crushing victory.

The throne of the One True God was in Artosh-sama's grasp…it was unquestionable.

A Master like that, had only ever mentioned the possibility of defeat once.

"There's a chance I might be defeated."

- You're joking.

"I'm very strong."

- Of course.

"Nobody's strength is greater than mine."

- Of course.

"That's why there's something I just can't understand."

Something you can't understand?

"I can't understand it, because only the weak are able to. It's the unknown possibility that I may lose to one stronger than I."

- ……

"That's why I wanted to create – a unit that has the 「Imperfection」 one strong as I am does not possess."

- Imperfection?

"The imperfect unit will use its full power – whether or not it can exert its power and overcome adversities, I won't understand it."

- ……

"But no matter whether I win or lose – in the end they will all be 「Causes」."

“The first feather of my eighteen wings, first unit Azrael.”

…Yes.

“When I fall in combat, please be my witness as the loser, and mourn for me.”

- Azrael doesn't know what Master saw.

But at the same time as he hinted at the possibility of defeat, the Master wasn't scared, instead he had appeared like a true God of War –

Anticipating the appearance of an unknown enemy – and despite this he strived to overcome this unknown –

A smile of simple courage yet of true happiness.

“So, let's now create this special unit…her name shall be –“

Just like that, the Master Artosh…

He finally produced his last work – the 「 Special Unit」 who became the 「 Final Unit」 - the imperfect unit.

In the end, it was also the unit that was able to witness the answer at the end of the horizon where even the Master could not.

The Master called out her name.

- Jibril.

Part 7

“…Senpai, are you finally awake?”

- My body is so heavy, that was Azrael's first thought as she awoke.

My wings can't move, and I just can't seem to be able to use force – no!

She realized that she had never known how it felt to use the strength of her own body.

How does my body move? Isn't it just like teleporting?

The so-called earth – is this how it limits the presence of my being?

Raising her head that felt heavy as a rock, Azrael looked down at her own shadow.

And looking down at her was Jibril – and the two Imanity Sora and Shiro.

The lowest ranked among the 「 Sixteen Races」 , the weakest species looked down at her and said.

“You attempted to play a game with the status of 「 Im the strongest」 , then you decided it was a crappy game just after a single loss, now that's just ridiculous.”

Shiro smiled as well as she heard Sora's words – however Azrael couldn't understand what they meant –

“Now you're going to replay the game with the status of 「 The weakest」 , and if you still think it's a crappy game –“

“…We'll play with you…as many times as needed…”

She understood that the 「 Word Spirit」 that used on her – limited her abilities to that of an Imanity's.

The very smiles of the siblings told her this – Azrael bent her head down and smiled bitterly.

- So, she couldn't fly, she didn't have magic, and she wasn't even able to see spirits.

Distance, gravity, all these concepts that she had never experienced were now tying her down.

She rolled to the side, focused her energy on her restricted arms and stretched towards the sky.

- So high, the skies are so high, and the earth so wide.

The power that was acting on her body was as if an infinite wall had been built up between her and the sky and earth.

She couldn't even imagine what it felt like to 「 Fly」 anymore.

Even if one were to tell her she could fly, she didn't have any intention to. And that scared her.

While the two Imanity that were restricted in the same way – laughed as they soared through the skies, and had said they had tricked her.

"…The taste of the earth…isn't that bad…right?"

"If you don't crash to the ground, you'll never have the urge to fly again."

They had soared in the skies so freely, and yet they were able to say that crashing once wasn't bad.

"- Right, you can climb up after you fall down, so there's a next time, isn't it?"

Sora smiled as he stretched his hand towards her – for that was what they had done all this time.

- Finally, in Azrael's mind, everything connected seamlessly and she couldn't help but smile.

Too late, she was just too late, it was but reasonable that they called her an idiot, Azrael thought as she grabbed onto that outstretched hand.

"…Senpai's brain is just too stubborn."

Jibril looked at her with her eyes half open yet caring, and welcomed Azrael as she stood up.

Artosh's final work – the imperfect unit. She was the 「Special Unit」, and the 「Final Unit」.

Her imperfections merely meant that – she would strive to be perfect.

Because she was imperfect, she would naturally strive for the unknown, the future and hope.

- Azrael finally understood – the reason why Jibril insisted on campaigning alone.

"…Jii-chan's brain is too active-nyan…"

She had destroyed the Elves' city and brought all those books back with all smiles even without being ordered to.

She had conquered all the higher ranked species alone despite being told it was impossible, and had returned near death every single time.

She had deserted the council, left her hometown, and even brought new Masters as she returned –

It was exactly because she was imperfect – that's why she would – become stronger than anyone.

"…I see, so there really are things that can't be understood just through reading-nyan…"

The so-called understanding wasn't just reliant on memorization and increasing knowledge.

It was through actualization, personal experiences, it was only when it assimilates into your very soul that one can truly understand something.

The thing that neither Artosh nor Azrael could understand - 「The unknown」.

That was the 「Possibility」 - the characteristic that could turn the impossible into possible.

It was exactly because they were the strong ones, exactly because they absolutely couldn't fail, exactly because they couldn't lose – that they were unable to understand this.

While –

"It's obvious that when one becomes a loser one is no longer perfect…however I…always feared that-nyan."

Only Jibril had slowly understood that every single time as she neared defeat/

- Whenever they lost, no matter the Flügel or Avant Heim, they were unable to grasp this imperfection.

While – never once faltering in her footsteps, it was no surprise that Jibril had left.

The Flügel – Azrael and the others could only gather knowledge.

Only Jibril freely pursued her curiosity, created knowledge, and left behind everything she needed to know.

She was a truly strong person, yet she was always striving towards an even greater goal – she even had respect towards the 「Unknown」.

- That could only mean one thing.

“Nyahaha, nyahahahaha…how boring, I'd never thought that it would be this boring after I understood it.”

She looked down, and she could only laugh – which meant…

“Have you finally understood?”

“Yes, I get it now – there's nothing particular to be understood-nyan.”

- How could she not laugh at that?

The answer that they had been searching for over six thousand years – in the end there was 「No answer at all」 -

“The unknown will definitely never be reversed into knowledge, because our knowledge will eventually transform into the unknown, there is no end to this as what may be common knowledge yesterday may not be common knowledge today.”

It was because that she had never lost, so after her first loss, she was truly able to fear – the unknown.

The more she tried to understand it, the further it shrank away from her.

“So the important thing is not to 「Memorize」, it's to 「Learn」 - and even enjoy the risk that comes with adapting to the situation.”

Thus – the only way was to continuously strive forward –

“The reason why we lost in the Great War was because we were unable to accomplish that. Azrael-senpai, when I lost to the Masters and kneeled in front of them to acknowledge my subservience, Artosh's final order – was completed.”

Azrael looked down and mumbled:

“…Artosh-sama…did I accomplish your final orders as well?”

- Did she not have to lie anymore?

Azrael looked up at the distant skies once again as she wiped away her tears.

She had never realized that she had the ability to shed tears – was this enough to appease Artosh-sama?

Sora looked at her face.

“…I'm not really sure what you're getting at, but that expression isn't half bad.”

Finally – Sora spoke to Azrael with a smile on his face.

“…May I ask you four questions? Imanity – no, So-chan, Shi-chan.”

- There was no answer in the first place, they merely had to go back to square one – which meant that she had some things to confirm.

“You both…what do you live for?”

“For Shiro, of course.”

“…For Nii.”

“What if one of you were to die?”

“If we die we die together, so there isn't much of a big deal.”

“…Together.”

“Why…what keeps you living?”

“I have no idea!”

“…God knows!”

“We don't have time to be considering this sort of thing, we're different from you anyway, life is short.”

“…Busy…”

- They didn't hesitate throughout, Sora replying with a smile on his face while Shiro replied rather seriously.

But – those weren't the answers she was looking for – she could only reference them.

So at last – Azrael asked:

"Can I…can I be like Jii-chan as well?"

"That's impossible, you can only be yourself."

- They replied without hesitation as well, which was to be expected.

She had known that since long ago, but as Azrael began looking increasingly melancholy, Sora instead –

"But what's wrong with that?"

Completely cheerful – his smile was, without a doubt –

"Your expression now is excellent, I love it when you're like this."

- He spoke with a smile as wide as the skies.

…

…Nyahahaha.

"The answer that we'd searched for over so long turned out to be 「Going back to square one」, I can't take this, even people who can live forever get tired you know-nyan."

Yes – thinking for oneself, which was their – reply.

She had to look for it herself, then find her own answer that belonged to her and her alone just like Jibril had.

- As long as she knew she could accomplish it – it was enough.

Azrael said tiredly, however –

Suddenly, she heard Jibril apologizing to Sora.

"…Masters, I put my own life on the line on my own accord, and even had to rely on your strength in the end…I offer my sincerest apolo –"

"Ah~ about that, Jibril."

Sora scratched his head, seemingly not knowing where to start and said:

"This fellow over here doesn't have the rights to order all Flügel to commit suicide!"

"-------What!?"

Ignoring the speechless Jibril, Azrael said bitterly:

"Huh? The cat's out of the bag!"

She stuck out her tongue evilly and laughed.

"Banning the act of suicide without permission – doesn't actually mean I can order you all to commit suicide! Hmm~ I'd never thought that this lie would go unnoticed for over six thousand years, nyahahaha ♪"

Shiro continued even more directly –

"…And even if she did…Jibril belongs to…Nii and Shiro…"

-

She had dragged her masters in, and had prepared to die –

As Sora noticed that Jibril's shoulders were beginning to tremble in anger, he sighed and said:

"- But if it's just Azrael alone, she can do it."

Jibril inhaled sharply as she heard that, while Azrael immediately erased her smile.

"This fellow over here bet herself and only herself from the very beginning, as no matter the consequence she was prepared to die alone. What kind of sister would tell her beloved imouto to go kill herself? She's Jibril's trusted sister after all!"

- Azrael remained silent, then sighed and replied.

And that reply was more convincing than any form of protest she may have made.

If there was an 「Answer」, and if the Flügel could find that answer, even if she were to exercise her rights for all of them to commit suicide, no one would want to die. Even if there was no answer, with Jibril at the head of them, if they could all find a reason to continue living, they wouldn't want to kill themselves as well anyway.

- At that time, Azrael whose purpose of living was to prevent anyone from committing suicide, would have completed her mission.

"…So-chan, have you ever pissed people off by not minding your own business?"

"Yeah, many times, and I pissed them off a lot as well. However I decided long ago that I won't let anyone die in this world (game), so –"

- She heard a single clap.

"Let's play a game."

Sora clapped his hands and spoke while laughing.

"It would be a pain if we had to start from scratch, huh?"

- No doubt, so let's play a game.

"So, things are simple now, anyway let's switch a game first."

- It would definitely be an extremely interesting game.

"We want to make this world – even more interesting."

- A game that would never get boring.

"As for whether or not we can do it – so, which side will you bet on?"

…

-…..

"Nyaha…nyahahah, nyahahahahahhahahahah!!"

In six thousand years, no, possibly for the first time in her life, she laughed sincerely.

Maybe because her physical abilities were being restrained by the Imanity – she laughed too hard to the point where her stomach began to ache.

Azrael laughed so emotionally that she even started to cry, and she raised her head – and then -

-She grabbed onto Sora and kissed him.

"Ugh!?"

"…!?"

"What – M, Master!? A-Azrael-senpai!!"

…For a full few seconds, Azrael tongue-kissed Sora and stopped.

"Nyahaha~ if both sides bet that 「It's possible」, the bet won't be valid ♥"

""…""

Sora appeared lost, while the other two looked at them with gazes that could kill, and Azrael spoke, ignoring them:

"We...as for me who wanted to die, you gave me a chance to have fun with you all, and so I'm extremely overjoyed at your request-nyan. But – I don't yet have the right to walk alongside So-chan like Jii-chan does."

She waved and turned to leave…she felt the gravity that restrained her body and continued forward.

Her sister worried about her, the Imanity worried about her, comforted her, and even prevented her from committing suicide.

No matter what you were to say – if this were to go on, I would be relying on them too much, and she smiled bitterly.

“But this is fine as well, since I bet it's 「Possible」 too-nyan? Before the results come out – I'll try my best to wait for it, since Jii-chan believes in me-nyan, I hope that you all can just wait for me a while more.”

Part 8

“…Nii…you let her kiss you.”

“Just wait a minute here, no matter how you look at it, she forced herself on me right?”

“You say that, Master, but because of the 「Ten Pledges」 it isn't possible to abuse another's rights, so unless the Master had allowed it subconsciously there was no other way that Azrael-senpai could have kissed you.”

“Wait a second, if I were to deny a beautiful lady like that unconsciously that would be disastrous to me as a guy!”

“…Nii is fine with anyone…as long as it's a girl…”

“You're just like Ino-sama.”

“Come on already, no matter how you look at it, I'm the victim! Right! Hey!”

Azrael's mouth curled up in a smile as she heard the commotion behind her, and she spoke softly as she was leaving:

“…Speaking of which, Jii-chan-nyan.”

“…You finally added a –nyan to that. Ignoring the fact that you were rude to my Masters and that you've been lying to us for so long – even someone as tolerant as I am almost about to get angry. What is it? Azrael-senpai.”

Jibril teleported beside her and spoke unhappily.

Azrael asked her a question that she had thought of.

“Jii-chan-nyan, why do you think the Imanity had survived during the Great War?”

“It was because…”

That was a question that had nestled inside Jibril for an extremely long period of time, and it had begun to trouble her even more recently.

The Imanity were seen as too weak, so no one had paid particular attention to them and thus they had survived.

But after meeting Sora and Shiro, Jibril felt confused.

At the end of the Great War, the entire Elkian continent was the territory of the Imanity, was that just by pure chance –

The Imanity – Azrael attempted to guesstimate the source of their power.

“Let's say that they keep losing until they can't lose anymore – that's the Imanity.”

- They continued 「Learning」 by using defeat or loss as their premise, not fearing the unknown, instead happily diving into it.

Because they were more imperfect than anyone, they were a race that strived to be even more perfect than anyone – if so…

Azrael smiled bitterly, and the reason behind it was not because of the reason they survived, but…

“…Why didn't I take notice of a race like that during the Great War?”

- Jibril inhaled sharply.

Ignoring the two Masters for now, the late king that had exposed the Eastern Federation's game, and Kurami who had collaborated with an Elf.

The potential they had shown was almost scary – Jibril had experienced this personally.

They were sometimes borderline insane, and at times even not afraid of death – despite this, they were able to bring in the next generation.

"A race that continued to learn continuously – why did I not take a threat like that into consideration –"

That would mean that no matter how weak one was, as long as one could keep on collecting knowledge, that person would become an unavoidable threat.

If she had noticed the full potential of that race earlier, what would she have done during the Great War?

It was obvious – they would be 「Too dangerous」, and she would have eliminated them immediately.

"- And all our records of the Imanity – they were completely erased, and why is that?"

Yes, all the records of the Imanity during the Great War had all been destroyed – it was almost unnatural.

"Nyahahaha~ I just thought of it randomly-nyan, maybe we –"

As Azrael said this, she looked towards Sora and Shiro.

"The battlefield isn't just on the Elkian continent anymore."

No doubt, that was something that looked like they would have done.

"The Ex-Machinae that killed Artosh-sama were acting suspiciously during the final stages of the Great War, if –"

Halfway through her sentence – she smiled without a trace of humour in her eyes, and concluded.

"Could they have been manipulated by the Imanity-?"

If so – the death of Artosh that was the ignition fuse for the end of the war –

- Was intentionally manipulated by someone-?

"Just joking~~ I must be thinking too much? Nyahahaha"

As she said this, Azrael left behind Jibril who was standing motionless and continued forward.

- She should have had walked for a quite a distance, but she didn't reach anywhere.

Jibril who should have been behind her long ago was still beside her nonchalantly, making Azrael feel rather awkward.

"Jii-chan-nyan, I'll do as they say and live shackled temporarily-nyan – and then…"

She laughed.

"During the next council meeting I'll propose for 「Avant Heim to join the Elkian Federation」-nyan."

"…I don't think that proposal will be approved for now."

It was something that Jibril clearly desired –

As she considered this, Azrael smiled cunningly at her.

"Observing and learning from those kids (Elkia). The 「Answer」 that we found – it will merely be a 「Superficial Alliance」 created in order to allow everyone to fulfil Artosh-sama's final order – how does that sound? Nyaha"

Her expression seemed to say: I didn't lie for six thousand years for nothing.

"…That's pretty hard to turn down…"

Avant Heim was originally a completely neutral faction, without land nor resources.

If it was a figurative alliance, and there was no moral duty for them to help out Elkia, they only had to participate when their own interests were at hand –

Also they would have the assurance of the Representative of the Winged that it was an alliance for Artosh – so they should have no reason to refuse.

…Her mind's clearly so sharp, but why – Jibril sighed.

"But…"

Suddenly – Azrael looked at her solemnly in stark contrast from her previous appearance.

“All the Flügel including myself, before we judge whether the potential of Elkia (those two) is worthy for us to believe in, I won't allow them to refer to those two as their 「New Masters」 - understood?”

“Of course, everyone needs to understand this themselves, thus Ill continue preaching from today onwards, don't worry.”

As long as she were to continue preaching her Bible (observation diary), increase their amount of fans – disciples it would be fine, Jibril told herself.

Azrael smiled bitterly and turned towards her once again.

“…Before that, can I entrust those two to Jii-chan-nyan?”

Those two were a yet unknown combination, so Azrael could understand why they were so full of charisma.

But at the same time – she was afraid for them, as if they were to die before she were to make a conclusion, there would be a lot of trouble, after which she said:

“I'm not asking this as the Representative of the Winged, but merely as a friend – please?”

- Jibril smiled as she always had.

“I've always believed in protecting my masters even if I have to sacrifice myself – so I refuse.”

“- Really, now…nyahahaha…”

Which was hinting that they weren't friends – which was but of course, after doing all those outrageous things, she still dared to call herself a friend –

“But if you keep dragging your feet like this, you're going to miss all the most interesting parts - 「Onee-san」 ."

- Jibril said this while smiling at her 「Sister」 .

…

“N-no problem-nyan… Ill hurry over to my cute imouto's side as fast as possible-nyan/”

Nyahahaha, she laughed and walked away in an attempt to restrain her tears.

She had changed in the short period of an hour as well, so she figured it wouldn't take long –

As she was leaving, she suddenly stopped and surveyed her surroundings – she sighed and waved.

“Everyone~ can someone carry me~! Also we need to hold a meeting ASAP~! Ill need at least a road to get home with or else it'll be a big problem for me, so could you all please build some~ nyahahaha ♪”

Walking home with her powers sealed away from her.

She couldn't even do that – that sensation felt overwhelmingly exotic.

Even something as stupid and boring as this – felt interesting, and she couldn't help but laugh at herself.

Placing her feet one after another on the ground, with the same line of sight as those two had, looking at the world at the speed of an ant's crawl.

- After living for twenty-six thousand years – this isn't that bad for a change.

- ……..

- You want to have them as your new Masters?

“That’s not my decision-nyan, so spend a little time to think about it yourself as well, Avant-kun (Avant Heim).”

- …Although it’s a tough decision, I’ll try.

“To be honest I don’t think it’ll be all that bad serving under those kids for a while.”

- Because of their potential?

Azrael could only reply by flapping her wings that couldn’t lift her into the sky.

“Because it seems oh so fun-nyan! Nyahaha~!”

- You seem truly happy.

I wonder what I’ll play with them next time, she began thinking –

Part 9

- On the other hand, within the capital of Elkia, the late king’s library.

Izuna was tucking into a huge portion of sashimi, while Steph sat reading beside her.

Steph looked at Izuna who was enjoying the food prepared by her.

“…Izuna, you’re a really big eater.”

That made her smile – but as she remembered her grandfather as he was on the brink of death, Steph felt confused instead.

Izuna tries so hard, and she’s helped out so much – but…

Impossibly – from her expression she couldn’t detect any hint of urgency, anxiousness nor unease.

“About that, it’s hard for me to start but…Izuna, aren’t you worried for Ino-san?”

- Izuna paused momentarily…with a chunk of fish still lodged in her mouth, she replied without hesitation:

“Of course not, des. Why would I be? Des.”

“…You asked why…”

“Sora and Shiro will save him, so there’s no problem, des.”

- She once again replied without a single hint of hesitation, after which she continued eating.

Steph sighed and looked at the book in her hand again, then continued with a complaint.

It was a small question she was worried about since a long while ago –

“Why do both Miko-san and Izuna trust that 「Liar」 so much?”

It was true that Sora and Shiro would always end things off at the very end brilliantly.

But throughout the process they would lie and deceive, so one wouldn’t know when to believe them or not.

As Steph was thinking, Izuna tilted her head and said:

“…Sora and Shiro aren’t 「Liars」, des.”

“- Izuna can read the Imanity language now, but you haven’t 「Mastered」 it yet.”

If they weren’t 「Liars」, who would be – Steph smiled bitterly and said, but –

“The smell of a liar- the smell of someone hiding his true self, they don’t have that smell which I hate the most, des.”

-

Steph was speechless. Back on the day when Sora had said she would save Izuna's grandfather.

Izuna smelt Sora by the seaside – Izuna smiled as she recalled that relaxing odour.

"Sora and Shiro have a good smell, des. They do tease people, deceive them, or even play pranks – but, the only thing they won't do is lie, des – so Izuna likes Sora and Shiro, des."

- Steph inhaled sharply as she realized she had been lectured by a young girl with her age still in the single-digit range.

It was hard to believe, but she somehow understood now – an impossible explanation flashed across her mind.

Sora – he told lies as easily as breathing, being a born liar.

But for some reason sometimes – Steph would unconsciously overlap his figure with her grandfather's.

Upon thinking closely, there wasn't anything that surprising about it.

If he could really lie that well…

Then why – would he want to act in such a way that people would believe he was lying?

- Why – why didn't he just act like a kind person - ?

At this point, Steph noticed that Izuna was looking at her with her eyes half open.

"…Steph-kou smells nice as well, des. But sometimes you have the smell of a liar, des."

"W-what!? W-when did I ever tell a lie!?"

"Whenever we mention Sora, you have the smell of a liar, des. I don't like Steph-kou when you're like that, des."

"T-that was because Sora forced me to fall in love with him! Of course I have to reject him right!?"

Steph attempted to defend herself while still teary-eyed, while Izuna's expression suddenly turned rather complex.

"You're lying again, des…but your normal smell is good, so I forgive you, des."

Izuna began eating again as soon as she finished, while Steph thought to herself"

- I see, let's say I go back a hundred steps – no, a thousand steps, I trust that Sora isn't a liar.

But despite that –

"That doesn't mean he can use the pledges to restrain my love life! Isn't that a twisted sense of logic!?"

Steph clutched her head and cried, while her gaze settled upon a single book.

It was slightly further away from her – an ancient-looking bounded book.

"…「The Treasure of the Prideful Princess」…is this a fairy tale?"

It was a book written in the Imanity language – a book with a rather childish title.

As she flipped it open, this was written on the inner cover page:

-「This is a tale that has circulated amongst the Elves」-

"Is this a translation? The translator is – isn't this Grandpa!? Why would this book be…"

Steph mumbled to herself as she flipped to the next page, after which she suddenly inhaled sharply.

Because this was written on the very first page:

- This is a place even further than the sea.

A「Fairy Tale」further away than anything and anyone else –

After which she saw a familiar scrawl underneath…

Which meant the late king's handwriting, and it read:

- According to my observations, the hibernating Empress of the Sea went into slumber after reading this story.

- The Empress is just like the Princess in this story, being loved by everyone, and has everything in the world.

- Thus she…wishes to pursue things unknown to her.

- It's exactly because she has everything, she wishes for the unknown – a love she cannot acquire –

"I FOOOOOUUUUNNNNDDDD IIIIIIIIIITTTTTTTTT!!"

Steph yelled and kicked her chair to the side, while Izuna leaped up in surprise.

Part 10

- Avant Heim – within a slightly larger cube in the centre of it.

It was Jibril's previous residence, which had been turned into a storage warehouse.

Important items, books and the like had probably all been moved to the Elkian library, so there was a lack of homeliness within it.
The Flügel didn't appear to need sleep, so there weren't any beds nor windows within the place.

There was a secret room that held things other than books, and for Sora, Shiro and Plum who didn't like going outdoors, the place was just right for them.
"Ah, Masters, please don't touch those, because there's a possibility that, no, you will definitely die."

After this warning, they made note not to take particular notice of all the trophies and skulls Jibril had collected during the Great War, which was a blessing in disguise, but –
"…Strange…"

Within the middle of the room, there was stacked a pile of books that had been collected from almost a hundred Flügel who had sworn on the Pledges.
Buried in that mountain-high pile of books, Sora felt exhausted and began mumbling to himself.

Shiro who was sitting on his lap began writing something in a notebook as well, after which she began drawing squiggly lines unhappily and groaning impatiently.
"…Masters, would you like to take a rest?"

The two were frustrated at the speed of their progress, while Jibril advised them to stop.

- After the game had ended, the two had begun reading the extremely large amount of books they had won over, looking for information in the process.

Jibril only suddenly noticed as she was writing in her Observational Diary (Bible), that the last time Sora and Shiro (Masters) had slept – was before Plum had arrived.

As she realised that was about five days ago, she advised them again, while Sora simply scratched his head as though he didn't hear her at all.

"There are clearly nineteen types of 「Oaths」 - but why isn't there any difference between the awakening conditions?"
"Could it be…we came here…for nothing…?"

At the end of the game, Plum had activated a spell, deceiving even Azrael who had the power of a Phantasma within her.
Plum was extremely exhausted after that feat, so she moaned while lying on the floor and breathing weakly.

They had did so much, could it be that there was no meaning in it – Plum began to appear despaired, but instead Sora –
"…The problem's even more serious than that…I'll straighten it out for you!"

Sora sighed and turned to Plum to explain:

"The Empress of the Seirenes is their full representative, so the fact that she bet all her rights in order to enter a slumber to the Seirenes would mean that as long as someone else were to wake her up, their Race Piece would be

taken which would be tantamount to death – so they hid the condition to awaken her."

"Y-yes…that's true…"

"The ultimate form of concealment is not letting anyone know, which is why Plum couldn't find out the condition herself."

- But…

"The current Empress had entered slumber before becoming the Empress, so the Seirenes should have tried all possible methods to awaken her already – which means, previously someone knew how to awaken her, but those conditions have probably been modified by someone now."

Can you understand everything up to here? Sora asked, to which Plum nodded in confirmation.

"In the previous eight hundred years, there were of course people that played games in attempts to waken the Empress, among which nineteen of them were recorded by Avant Heim over five races, and they had found the 「Oath」 back then. As long as we can find that information and cross-reference it with everything we have, we can retrace back to the past and find the conditions to wake the Empress – that was my initial plan."

Shiro let out a hnng~ a tiny moan, and collapsed on Sora's knees – she had overworked her brain.

The 「Oath」 written in the languages of five different races, they had even cross-referenced the meanings of all the words – but…

"-「The person who can wake the Empress」 - that's the limit to which we can retrace."

The person that could wake her – which would mean, 「It would be fine even if you don't let her fall in love with you」."

To acquire everything - 「Win all the rights」, that was the only victory reward the two could affirm existed, but at that point that meant nothing to them.

What was most important was – Sora said impatiently:

"Why isn't there a 「Victory Condition」 - they hid the wrong details!"

If 「All their rights」 were taken before the previous Empress had died, it wouldn't cause them much danger to their survival.

They should have revealed the victory conditions in order to allow people to beat the game as fast as possible – despite this, there were no records…

"…The worst…possibility…"

"- Huh?"

As Plum heard Shiro mumble, she looked at her in despair, pleading for her to explain.

"…From the very beginning…no one…knew the condition…"

"…Even the Empress doesn't know, the possibilities of a victory condition that isn't specific – for example…"

Sora took a deep breath and spoke, almost squeezing his voice out:

"…「Amuse me. I don't know how you're going to do it, but you have to do it in a specific way.」 - Something like that."

- Plum's eyes rolled up into whites and she collapsed, and to be honest, Sora felt just like her.

If that was the truth – the reason why no one could awake her, the reason why Plum was unable to find the condition – the reason why the love magic worked properly but was unable to wake her up, and –

Even the reason why they could completely hide the conditions – everything could be explained.

Since no one knew from the very beginning, there was no reason to conceal it.

Which meant they had to search for 「What was the Empress looking for when she went into hibernation」 - back to square one.

“Ah~ dammit, what's wrong with that woman!?”

Sora yelled out in a voice saturated with heavy frustration, after which he collapsed.

Even Shiro gave up and began yawning on Sora's lap, while Plum – fainted.

This scene could be titled 「Despair」 and framed in an art gallery.

“…So for a change of mood, can I tell you all about something that happened in the past?”

Jibril snapped her fingers lightly, and instant the walls and ceiling of her home turned as transparent as glass.

Sora lay on the floor, and what he saw was a night sky – no, wrong.

They were on the edge of the atmospheric layer – the divide between the universe and planets.

Which meant that was the universe. As he understood that, he suddenly heard a calming sound, like the call of a whale.

“...That was…?”

“It was 「Him」 - the sound of the Phantasma Avant Heim.”

As she said this – Sora recalled a huge whale-shaped slab of land during their game against Azrael.

…He was on his back right now, and as that was too ridiculous to consider, he figured he would forget it soon anyway.

“「He」 was a disciple of my late Master, the Old Deus Artosh.”

Jibril spoke with a nostalgic glow in her eye.

“Artosh died at the end of the Great War – but 「He」 couldn't accept it, so he drifted from place to place in search for him, approaching any single presence of Old Dei he could find.”

Jibril looked at the sky – the red moon.

“The red moon (up there) is the dwelling place of the thirteenth-ranked 「Lunarians」, as well as the Old Dei that created them.” [29]

- Maybe because it was bigger than the moon of their original world, or because they were closer to it, it was a gigantic red moon he had seen countless times before.

Sora had never considered that there might be 「Sixteen Races」 up there.

“- Whenever Avant Heim sees the red moon, he will attempt to raise his altitude upon detecting the presence of Old Dei, but –“

Jibril smiled a complex yet sad smile.

“Avant Heim can't do it.”

“…Can't do it?”

“Avant Heim doesn't fly in the sky, he revolved about the planets – he swims within the Elemental Galleries that the Imanity cannot see, so he can't go into space where there are no Spirits – so…”

Sora's gaze shifted up along with Jibril's, and he remained momentarily speechless.

- He had never seen the Milky Way up close.

But compared to photos online, it was way more epic than he thought it would have been, a glittering river of stars suspended in mid-air.

Suddenly a flash of light streaked past as though to cover the red moon up.

“He's looking at the red moon…and crying.”

The light emitted an afterglow that shimmered faintly as it passed, and swam away.

Earlier they had heard the call of a whale as well, and now – it sounded rather lonely to them.

“…Do the Phantasma have feelings as well?”

-The「Phantasma」 that were ranked second among the「Sixteen Races」.

Sora then thought, it was of course reasonable that Azrael had called upon them so emotionally as she was ranked as well.

But it just seemed rather impossible to believe that a floating slab of land could have emotions.

Then – Sora remembered something all of a sudden, and he said sadly:

"…Even the Phantasma know「Love」, but I don't…"

"Huh? Why do you say「He」 knows love?"

"He knows to cry for his Master, and he has a Master to love – even if it isn't love, doesn't that mean he knows love?"

"…"

- Jibril suddenly said thoughtfully.

"Master, is there a person whose absence would make you feel uncomfortable?"

"Shiro."

"So the one you love is –"

"Shiro – ah~ so if I know love and I know how to love, does that mean I know how to fall in love?"

Love differs from person to person – what a troublesome concept.

What was the Empress searching for before she hibernated? If it was truly related to love, then he could do nothing – Jibril was thinking of something else at the same time.

"…Is it really like that?"

When Artosh had been conquered, Jibril had felt crushing despair along with the rest of the Flügel.

After that, the Flügel had begun gathering information, they didn't know what they were searching for, but they still searched.

The reason to live, the reason to exist, the reason to not die –

Searching for those「Answers」 that couldn't possibly exist – but Jibril found it.

It wasn't a common answer, but it let her find – her own reason to exist.

"…? What is it, Jibril?"

It wasn't for knowledge, but instead for the「Unknown」 ahead of her that confused her, if –

"M-master, forgive me for asking, but could you listen to a single request of mine?"

"Yeah, what is it?"

"Could you please say「Jibril you useless fellow, I don't need you anymore」?"

"…L-let me just say something here, I don't get where this conversation is going at all."

"Just don't ask – please."

As he saw Jibril press her forehead on the ground while bowing deeply, Sora accepted her request reluctantly.

"-「Jibril you useless fellow, I don't need you anymore」 - is that alright?"

-

"M-M-M-M-Master!!"

"- W-w-what!?"

She teleported so close to Sora that their heads almost connected, which caused Sora to cry out uncontrollably.

"W-why is this? I'm currently feeling the same sensation of my spine tingling as I licked the feet of that long-eared one under Master's orders, and the time where I stole Shiro-san from you during the FPS in the Eastern Federation –

and a feeling as if my chest is being constricted! What exactly is this unknown sensation!?"

"I don't know! I don't know, but aren't you adding too much weird elements into this!?"

Sora replied with his face set in stone as Jibril looked at him while panting, blushing and almost drooling.

Although, Jibril suddenly seemed to have understood something – she nodded, and then –

"Master, in the six thousand, four hundred and seven years since my birth – Jibril has finally understood what it means to fall in love."

"…Huh? Are you serious?"

"Yes, I can finally help Master out – and what love means is!"

Jibril kneeled down solemnly in front of Sora and reported.

"Master commanded Dora-chan to 「Fall in love with you」, and ignored her aside from that one time; as for Dora-chan that was a declaration of love, so! The feelings placed within me as the Master I've been serving under for so long with all my heart said he doesn't need me any longer – which is pity, bitterness, relaxation and all other sorts of feelings that make chills run down my spine, that's love-!!"

"Jibril, could you please just calm down, you're just making things more complicated –"

Sora said with his expression still carved in stone, at this time – with a loud slam! –

Shiro stood up.

"Huh!? W-what was that, Shiro, my heart nearly leaped out of my chest!"

However she completely ignored Sora's response.

"…Unknown sensation…I don't know…can't reach…yearning…Azrael couldn't find it…Jibril found it…Steph felt it…the unknown…the future…「Hope」."

- She was pretending to sleep earlier, so she had heard everything.

She mumbled a string of words – recited, as she suddenly began flipping through the books.

"…The Empress that deceived everyone…- the Empress…victory condition…wasn't changed."

She said.

She suddenly lifted up a book – and said:

"…Nii…I know…the condition…to awaken the Empress now."

- As they heard this, Sora, Jibril and even Plum leaped up together and looked at Shiro.

And only Shiro – appeared happy, no…

"…Nii as well…judgmental error…you do that sometimes."

Her expression was completely different from the usual, as she actually seemed happy and laughed.

"…Nii, Nii~ haha…Nii…messed up…♪"

Shiro shook her shoulders from side to side, her feet couldn't help but swing about – and she smiled victoriously.

Sora didn't get her meaning, but he did moan suddenly –

"W-wait a second, huh? I made a judgmental error? B-but situational decisions are…"

"…Yes, Nii's…forte…but this time…Shiro won♪"

- She appeared truly happy.

In that game, Sora only felt dizzy as it was the first time Shiro had beaten him at it.

"H-how is this possible…I lost in judging situations, deduction, strategy, my reason for existence…"

-『』 - They were the strongest Imanity gamers, two in one, and if he as the strategist were to lose in terms of judgment –

Ignoring Sora who was almost in tears, Plum immediately asked Shiro:

“W-what is it!? What do we have to do to awaken the Empress!?”

As everyone bated their breath in anticipation – and as Sora looked at her tearfully.

Shiro – revealed the answer.

Chapter 4: Retry

Part 1

"...So it's...like that, huh..."

"W-well there aren't any contradictions with Grandpa's work...wait, huh, is that it?!"

"My assumption was right after all, heh...ah, love is such a complex thing..."

"...We...nearly went extinct for a stupid reason like that...I'm gonna cry, you know...?"

"Phew ☆ This is a great opportunity, Plum ☆ Amira's feeling really energetic ♥"

"..S-Sora, Izuna doesn't understand at all, des."

"Sorry Izuna, but I'm just a useless eighteen-year-old piece of hikikomori virgin trash that's dragging 『』 down, so I don't understand as well. But Izuna's smart, so you'll understand it in the future. Now please excuse me so I can make my way to the garbage dump."

"Sora is getting thrown away, des? Can Izuna go and pick him up, des?"

"...Absolutely not...Nii belongs to Shiro. Let's change the subject...Nii go get ready."

"R-ready? O-other than getting in the way, is there really something else I can do...?"

"...This game...Shiro can't beat it...only Nii...can do it..."

"Alright then, let's go, Shiro!! If Shiro and I both can't do it, who can?!"

Part 2

"- How boring."

I sighed unconsciously.

Oceande is the birthplace of all the Seirenes.

Located at the very bottom of the ocean's depths, its endless foothills that were connected with triple seamounts and so forth were lit up by half-moon shaped streaks of light. [30]

Away from the unclean, filthy solid ground, the calm seawaters were like castle walls, having no direct passage towards Oceande.

Aside from countless unnamed fish and whales, there was only an extremely small amount of people that were able to reach the place.

The treasures located within the city were piled up in glittering, dazzling mountains, and the protections placed over them by the water elementals added a beautiful layer of oceanic blue over it.

It was a stunningly colorful paradise created from the magic of the Dhampirs.

But, it was also a prison.

“Oh come on~ really now, isn't there anything else more fun to do!?”

I pursed my lips, as everything seemed to be making me annoyed.

I'm getting bored of singing and dancing, not to mention that I've gotten bored of eating all those delicacies.

Oceande, the eternal paradise, beauty, wealth, love; everything was present there.

From the very instant that I was born, those things were all mine.

And it's exactly because of that – that I'll never be satisfied.

That's because I myself am the prettiest, most valuable piece of treasure and not others.

Even the most beautiful things in this world cannot reach my standard.

If there's something that this place doesn't have but yet something I truly wish for...

That is...love! Pure love!

A partner just as perfect and unchangeable as I am! An impeccable treasure that even the gods would desire.

I won't let anyone invade my pure soul – I'll wait for 「Him」 in this dreamy city.

The one that can give everything he has to me – an eternal lover.

The prince that can satisfy all my inner desires.

I fell asleep while waiting for 「Him」 ...huh? How long ago was that?

"...Never mind, it's not important."

If 「He」 doesn't come for me, things like time don't matter at all.

If my desires aren't satisfied, my entire existence would be like an empty shell -

-「Aschente」 -

Suddenly I heard a voice, and I gradually regained consciousness.

It seems someone has arrived, a shallow man that has come in search of my love.

With one little smile from me they would immediately fall before my irresistible charm, such cute idiots.

This man probably isn't the one I'm looking forward to as well. 「True Love」 doesn't come easily anyway.

But, after waiting so long, even I'm getting impatient.

"...Fine, since I'm bored anyway, I'll play with you for a while."

No matter how boring this man may be, he can at least pass some time.

Right – I'll be gentler to him this time.

I'll smile sweetly, flatter him a bit, then watch him fall head over heels for me.

After that, at the very last moment, I'll dump him as brutally as I can and toss him to the side like a soulless corpse.

This way, even an idiot might learn the meaning of 「True Love」 -

"Do you - ?"

"Huh...?"

A young man's voice drifted to me from the sky.

"- Do you want love -?"

You're asking me if I want love? Of course.

"...Yes, I do, but can you give it to me?"

"So – I'll give it to you!!"

"You~ are~ shock~!!" [31]

A shock that shook the oceans resounded, and I looked up – to see that the sky had shattered.

There's no other way for me to describe it; I could see it even from where I was in the ocean, as the sky gradually cracked and crumbled, falling like huge pieces of broken glass, crashing into the ocean – dying the seas and skies blood-red.

After which the owner of the voice fell into the ocean along with the splinters of the glass sky.

"- The sky~ it fell because~ of love...~~...you know?"

He was a male, black-haired, black-eyed Imanity wearing a shirt with the words「I♥Humans」emblazoned on the front.

And beside him, almost in contrast to him, a white-haired, red-eyed young Imanity girl.

The two had draped on them a jet-black cape that instantly would remind people of the kind villains would wear, and they spoke with evil smiles:

“Greetings, Sleeping Beauty. Sorry for disturbing you every single time before you go to rest. We're Sora and Shiro.”

“...Hello...”

...Hmm? They're using a different tactic this time.

Many men have attempted to seek my love in various sorts of ways, but this would be a first.

No, wrong – what I want is「True Love」- not just something flashy and original like this.

“Greetings, visitors of my dream. I welcome your arrival.”

It would be over after this sentence, my voice – no man can resist its charm -

“Ah, we apologize. The real versions of us aren't here right now.”

“...Useless, useless, useless...”

“So we can't hear your voice, forgive us for that, and now~ -”

The man smiled mischievously, then continued singing:

“You are shock – me and~ a few other things~ fell from the sky...”

- A shock rang out once again, at the same time the seas parted, and in the red skies...

“- Eek...!”

I cried out unconsciously.

It was a sky covered in hateful, fear-inducing, giant – monster babies.

A girl flew above that sky, with a halo on her head and light-woven wings stretching from her waist.

“You're an idiot, and you look cute while you're sleeping, but to think that idiots that can cause trouble even when they're asleep exist – the world really is a huge place.”

- Behind her were hundreds of – personifications of killers, the symbols of destruction -「The Flügel」!?”

“...Nii, sense of despair...doesn't seem enough...”

“Hmm~ That's right, I need to perfectly recreate ending B of「That game that scarred me the most emotionally (Drakengard)」, so I should have brought the real Flügel along, but - Azrael's power has been sealed so the council's definitely in a huge mess right now, as other than Jibril the rest are all just figureheads.” [32]

“Please take it easy, Master. It'll be just fine as long as I command about hundreds of manpower♪”

That man looked down at me while conducting a strange-sounding conversation.

“Alright, let's begin the game -「Make me fall in love with you」.”

...Huh?

The man said that, and then pointed towards the highest tower of Oceande - the hall of the Empress.

“We'll be right there, and as soon as you do, if you manage to make me fall in love with you, the game will be over.”

- The skies were twitching, and countless gigantic babies (monsters) began descending from its blood-red void.

The Flügel flew about with their wings spread wide.

...Y-you want me to move under these conditions...!?

“Speaking of which, Master...is it really fine for me to destroy the city just like that?”

I froze as I heard that Flügel ask expectantly.

“Yeah, no problem. Including the Empress as well, since this is all in a dream everything will return to normal in a matter of seconds anyway. Jibril, no matter how much power you use - the source is「 Infinite」 , so just release as much as you want.”

“Hehe, hehee, heheheheh~ Jibril's full of energy ♥”

- After which, the two Imanity turned around to face me once more.

“Also, when we created this setting -”

“...We brought your...friends, best friends...relatives as well.”

As I heard this I looked around desperately - when did they appear?

Mum, Grandma, my servants and sisters that I can't even remember the names of - they were all crying and sobbing.

“Which is what you're looking at...”

He smiled bitterly, scratched his head briefly and said:

“You along with the babies that your relatives would have given birth to being cut to pieces, exterminated, eliminated by Jibril, and you have to proceed while experiencing many other hardships...looking back at it, this setting really is pretty gruesome.”

“...That game...Nii said it would be a touching fighting game and let Shiro play it, Nii...I can't forgive you.” [33]

“I'm so sorry, because it's just too unbearable for me alone to carry that much emotional burden - so I just had to...”

The two finished blabbering, and they who called themselves Sora and Shiro spoke as one -

「 Now you will

Not receive any help

You will only face death

So let us see

How far you can struggle.」

After which - they spoke with smiles on their faces:

「 Go to hell.」

The Flügel then continued as she heard this:

“So, I'll start. First Unit, Jibril.”

The halo on her head began shifting and twisting into various complicated patterns, becoming bigger, multi-layered, just like a magic formation.

Her wings appeared to emit light, and they lost their shape - a spear-like thing began forming in her hands -

“To my Masters who have given me the opportunity to do this, I dedicate my utmost gratitude -”

“- Concentrated, full powered, 100% -「 Airstrike」 - it's coming for you ♥”

She said this, and the entire world was engulfed in light.

Part 3

On the other hand - in the hall of the Empress in Oceande -

"YEAH☆ Jii-chan's so cool~♥"

Amira cheered at the underwater projector which was displaying the state of the Empress' dream.

While beside her were countless other Seirenes who were cheering and dancing maniacally as well.

Sora, Shiro and Jibril's bodies lay on the floor almost lifelessly along with Plum and the other Dhampirs who had used all their strength transporting them into the dream world.

Beside them was Steph who was rolling her eyes, as well as an elderly Werebeast - Hatsuse Ino, as well as Izuna who was hugging onto him.

Looking at the three unconscious bodies on the floor, Ino asked:

"Um, about that...what exactly is going on here?"

"We're here to save Grandpa, des. You have to kneel and express gratitude, des."

Izuna said this while rubbing her face against her grandfather's - Ino's stomach, while Steph continued:

"A lot of things happened while Ino-san was here in Oceande...a lot of things."

- But he couldn't possibly understand anything from an explanation like that.

Ino fondled Izuna gently while expressing his confusion.

"...I would appreciate it if you could explain more thoroughly."

"Don't worry about it...since I don't actually get it either...but Sora has a message for you."

Mm-mm, Steph cleared her throat.

"-「We found the way to awaken the Empress, so we told the Seirenes who in exchange gladly gave you up in exchange for it, which is exactly what we're doing now」 ...that's it."

"Now I'm even more confused..."

"Let me continue...「Don't worry, we'll awaken the Empress and we won't let the Seirenes and Dhampirs go extinct, which is what we wagered on in the beginning of the game. As for what's going on, you'll have to wait until the game's over before you find out.」 -and..."

Steph smiled thinly and continued yet again:

"...「Lastly, Izuna seemed really lonely so we left her here with you. You have a really good granddaughter, Gramps.」 ...that's all."

"I...I see."

Ino smiled as he felt his granddaughter fondling him lovingly, but he thought to himself:

- Now I don't understand Sora even more.

Sounds of cheering erupted once again as Jibril's second「Airstrike」 was fired.

The Seirenes were feasting merrily while watching the events unfolding within the dream, while Plum instead advised them fearfully.

"A, Amira-sama...I completely~ understand how you feel, but could you please at least be more self-conscious -"

"Huh? Come on Plum♪ You don't need to be so formal all the time so just say what's on your mind, it's fine☆"

Amira smiled a saintly smile and continued:

"It feels so great watching that idiotic woman suffer~! Hahahah~☆"

- Her smile was pure, but her eyes weren't smiling.

"Amira was originally against the idea of repressing pain~ so I would say I'm already being rather self-conscious here~ hehe~☆"

- It's true, it was a dream, so in reality no one would get hurt.

Also, when Sora and Shiro had entered the Empress'dream, they had requested Plum to repress the pain sensors of the Empress.

It was a dream anyway, so there wouldn't be any pain, but despite this he had emphasized it time and again - which meant, there was a meaning behind his series of actions -

"...We really shouldn't have brought Izuna there, huh."

"Yeah, Sora-san managed to pass judgment that this isn't a scene a small child like her should be witnessing, so I guess I'm rather in awe of his morals."

"...? Is something going on, des?"

Izuna had her head buried in Ino's chest the entire time so she couldn't see the projection, but then she asked curiously.

Regarding the events unfolding in front of her - Plum replied:

"To put it bluntly...that's hell...no, that's a true nightmare..."

Undoubtedly, it was a scene that seemed to defy all laws governing the natural world.

- Steph had heard about it as well, the strongest attack of the Flügel - 「Airstrike」.

That spear of light could evaporate oceans in a single shot, and turn Oceande within the dream into a mere crater.

But - since it was a dream, everything would return to normal in a matter of seconds.

The babies crumbled immediately just like porcelain figurines, while Jibril relentlessly continued her onslaught with renewed vigor.

The endlessly disintegrating and repairing scenery along with Jibril's smile - or rather her murderous sneer, as she coldly, mechanically swung her arms.

With each swing, mountains were leveled, seas were spliced, and the ocean floors buckled and caved from the shock.

- That alone was sufficiently traumatizing to be considered a nightmare.

And it wasn't only Jibril as well, as the fake Flügel were destroying everything in sight along with her.

The baby-like monsters were simply characters that incited natural hatred and fear from onlookers, and they feasted on the various other people within the dream.

While the Seirenes were actually watching those events cheerfully, in an almost overjoyed fashion - everything was in a chaotic mess.

"...A-about that, since they know the reason why all this is happening, it's hard to blame them for their reaction...but..."

"...D-did they go a bit overboard? ...although I don't really understand what's going on..."

Steph, who knew the cause of the events up to this point yet didn't understand Sora's intentions, couldn't help but agree with Ino.

"...Although, not a day passes where I don't hate that Tet-sama who created the 「Ten Pledges」..."

Plum seemed as if she was going to faint anytime soon, and she said this with her face almost horrifyingly pale.

Because what she saw might actually be - no, it must be.

It was something even before the 「Ten Pledges」 - a scene that seemed directly ripped out of the 「Great War」.

"My ancestors actually survived through things like these...I respect them even more now."

"...More precisely, how exactly did the Imanity survive through conditions like these?"

"Before all this, were there any differences between the Imanity and the Werebeasts...? After I get back, I'm going to look through that bit of history again."

The three of them slipped into their own thoughts, but deep down they were all thinking of the same thing.

- The One True God (Tet), thank you for creating the 「Ten Pledges」.

Part 4

- The seawater had completely evaporated just after the first strike, and Leila could only crawl on the cracked, dried ground.

She couldn't breathe, and the sunlight corroded every pore of her body on the naked sea floor.

She couldn't feel pain, but her energy was being endlessly sapped from her.

The continuous assault of the Flügel didn't even give the seawater time to grow back.

The seawater evaporated, returned, and evaporated yet again, removing the Empress - removing Leila of her marine protection.

After which, the baby-like monsters that descended from the blood-red skies crept towards her, threatening to feast on her.

She had no water, she couldn't swim, so even if she belonged to a race loved and protected by the ocean - if she didn't have seawater she couldn't even disguise herself -...

"...P...phew...a-am I...finally there...?"

- How many days had it been? Or how many minutes?

Leila dragged her body to the front of the tower.

Behind her she could hear countless explosions, and the fires of hell were burning passionately there as well.

Above her were broken skies and cries of laughter, while on the ground were countless screams of terror and agony.

Leila fearfully opened the doors of the tower with all her might, and charged into it - at the same time...

She felt a shock that once again leveled the city behind her and yet another explosion - but Leila merely sat down in relief.

Because within the tower - there was water.

Probably because Sora and Shiro were there, it was the only place that even the attacks of the Flügel couldn't destroy.

As long as she had water, she could breathe and seduce... Finally -

"...Ha, hahaha....hehehehehe...you've got some guts - to dare to do something like this to me!"

Leila gasped for air, and from within her - surged torrents of red-hot anger.

- 「Make me fall in love with you」?

"...Fine, since you actually dared to play a fool with me this far, I'll make you pay."

- With a swish of her tailfin, Leila surged up the water-filled tower at a stunningly fast speed.

- I am the Empress of the Sea, I have everything, no one will resist my rule.

They actually dared to show such disrespect towards me - although I don't know what he wants -

"Don't think kneeling down and begging for forgiveness will save you!!"

Just one sentence, I just need for him to hear the slightest bit of my voice, and it will be all over.

- I'll sing a song, capture his heart, and make him kneel before me and lick the floor.

After which I'll reject him as coldly and heartlessly as I can, then push him into a bottomless canyon of despair.

I'll seduce him then push him aside, so when he leaves the dream - he will think the real world is the actual nightmare, and he won't be able to live with himself.

With these thoughts in her head, she smiled evilly, and swam through the waters - not long after...

She reached the topmost floor - the hall of the Empress - and stood before the gates to her own room.

"...Open."

- The doors immediately swept open along with the water current, almost as if they were forced open by her voice.

There was no doubt that Leila was the absolute ruler over the oceans, as all beings in the sea could only bow before her power through the 「Water Elementals」 within her. It was simply natural, it wasn't something one could fight against, it was a magic that surpassed even the boundaries of her species.

Because even if her opponent was an Elf, the spirits used within their magics would obey Leila.

In this world - there was nothing she could not tame.

Carrying an immense amount of self-confidence - no, with absolute belief, Leila - finally arrived.

Sora and Shiro - the two had dressed up like demon kings.

Sora seemed to be enjoying himself, even allowing himself to receive her with a cocky smile.

"- You've finally managed to get here...

Your stupidity really is entertaining...

But things seem to be going exactly as planned...

How enjoyable -"

"...Nii, you can stop that now..."

"Come on~ Shiro, don't cut me short halfway through my lines, I spent a lot of time preparing them you know."

Leila could only look at them with a raging fury in her eyes as the two quarreled.

Although their actions were unbelievably foolish - it was about time for them to pay the price.

And then, the Empress - Leila - wove her words with a voice even the Gods would be smitten with.

"Alright, are you done playing? Now kneel down and kowtow to me."

- I'll make him kneel first.

After that, I'll be sure to drag him so far in his brain will melt -

- However, as she heard his reply...

Leila couldn't believe her ears.

"Hey, didn't you hear what I said about the rules at all? Make me fall in love with you - can't you even flatter me or something?"

- Leila was speechless.

The young man and the girl before her - merely stood smiling even after she had used her voice that could hypnotize both genders regardless, and even managed to reply mockingly.

- They're fighting against it. Leila thought to herself in panic.

Because as long as she was in the water, they would definitely fall in love with her without exceptions, and their brains would be immobilized.

So let's try it out - let's see how long they can keep up their facade.

"...Yes, sorry, I was too excited, so I apologize for being so rude earlier."

Leila looked at them passionately with teary eyes, and continued almost pleadingly:

"I hope you can hear my true feelings - I want you, please reciprocate my love."

Not just her voice, but her every action - had a hypnotizing power that even brainwashing could not beat.

Behind her pleading words, it was almost as if she was entering commands - orders that were impossible to deny.

When faced with her irresistible charm, Sora merely - shivered slightly - and replied.

"...Ugh~ I'm sorry, I'm getting goosebumps, nope, can't do that."

...

- Huh?

"And to be honest, you're not even my type."

Huh?

"Also the rules clearly said that you need to make me fall in love with you, but you went and told me to kneel in your first sentence, apologized in your second, then finally said that your previous words weren't actually what you meant? Are you one of those tripmine girls people see on the internet? I'd never thought that people like you actually exist, that's quite a surprise."

...Leila could only stand there speechlessly.

They weren't fighting back, it was just that her magic wasn't working.

Why - was her dream being tampered with? No, even the Elven magics couldn't touch it.

She couldn't figure it out, but only one thing was truly confirmed -

This man came here with the firm belief that he wouldn't fall in love with me.

- Just then, the man turned to the young girl beside him for some sort of confirmation - and she nodded.

"Ah~ I can finally say it now, since previously everyone thought this was some sort of romance game, this is probably the first time someone has said something like this to you right? So including that Gramps from earlier, I'm going to take everyone's frustration out on you!"

After that - Sora inhaled deeply, and released a rapid-fire torrent of words:

"You're a grown woman for goodness sake, and here you are daydreaming and stuff. Are you stupid or something? Who do you think you are? An idiot? Do you really think that everyone has to treat you well? Even the kindergartners nowadays are smarter than you! Also do you have any idea how long you've been sleeping? Eight hundred years! Eight, hundred, years! Don't tell me you think you're some sort of sleeping beauty waiting for her prince? You're over eight hundred years old! You goddamn old hag! I said you were pretty old earlier, but you've got to have a limit somewhere! I confess, I do prefer older women, but they at least need to have some brains you know!? Also, the thing that I hate the most about you is your 「All men will definitely fall in love with me」 attitude! Women should know their place! Sexiness must come with some sort of humility and restraint before it has any meaning! Unless you're thinking something like this? That when people ask you to take off your clothes you just strip off everything without a doubt. Do you really think of yourself as a woman? Or that! Are you one of those people who try to get starring roles in AV's but when the actual shooting comes, you just take off your clothes and everything, one of those idiots with romantic stats of below twenty!? If you think all that matters is how much skin you show, you might as well go be a nudist! You bloody halfwit! Also, why do I have to suck up to a woman I don't like? With any semblance of common sense, one would immediately realize it's just a waste of time and effort! Are you genuinely an idiot!? If so, I might as well go chase some 2D girls, which would probably be more meaningful, less time-consuming, more appealing, and probably won't damage my wallet and break my heart! Furthermore, I want to say one last thing - I don't know whether you call those things water elementals or whatever but, you only have the ability to seduce and hypnotize when those things are around - so to be honest your looks are only at a medium standard; you're only going to be a third wheel in my crew, which you should have realized long ago if you would just look in the goddamn mirror! You sponge-brained idiot!!"

---...

Phew~~...

Not allowing his opponent to reply at all, Sora blabbered on and on - finally appearing somewhat pleased with himself.

“Ah~ that feels better...right, so I've said everything I wanted to say. I'm done here so I'm ending the game now, bye ♪”

Huh?

“- W-wait -!”

“I'm not waiting~! Are you having fun playing this game, making people run around for no particular reason? Thanks for having us over, idiot, goodbye~!!”

Sora and Shiro immediately disappeared after that, so maybe the game ended after all.

After that - the explosions she heard up until then stopped -

Different noises began quietly resounding within Leila's heart.

Part 5

“Hahaha, to think we would go that far. She's probably furious - is that enough? Shiro?”

“...Mm, Nii...Omega good job.”

The brother nodded in satisfaction, while the sister raised her thumb at him.

- Meanwhile, within the hall of the Empress, a thunder-like torrent of clapping began to resound from the Seirenes who were watching the show.

Almost in comparison, their friends, who were led by Steph, merely rolled their eyes in silence.

Sora and Shiro had made the Empress go through a horrible nightmare, and then left the game behind without even any words of comfort.

In that situation where no one seemed to know what they were trying to do - only one person...

“Phew~ that was entertaining...if I tell this to them (the Flügel), they would definitely be so jealous...”

Jibril, who had caused extreme havoc within the Empress' dream and returned to reality, spoke.

Her skin appeared to be radiating a faint glow, which probably wasn't their imagination.

But - with Steph at the head, everyone else who didn't seem to understand what they were doing had the same questions in their eyes.

- So what were they intending to do? - Sora laughed heartily at their confused glances.

He then said - I don't know either!

Sora had merely acted according to Shiro's orders - which meant...

“...Nii, just do it...like you normally would.”

Only one sentence.

“...Use every possible way you can think of...taunt her, and taunt her again, make her incredibly angry...just continue taunting her.”

- Just that.

Although, Sora did feel rather sad at the fact that her sister said that those were his normal actions.

Since Shiro said so, he needed to be confident himself, as that was the way to conquer her route, which meant he had to follow her orders to the end without question - without a single doubt.

- Suddenly, cracking sounds were heard.

The Empress' ice block had cracked slightly.

“- Huh?”

Ignoring the speechless crowd - Sora and Shiro excluded, the crack merely began expanding.

At the same instant as the transparent, crystalline ice began cracking all over, its surface and emitting a bright glow ...

Stardust-like seeds floated from it and splintered.

Within the reflective, cracking, moving splinters of ice - the Empress slowly opened her eyes.

Everyone could only stare speechless at that.

“Hey! Hey! Over here! You can't hit me due to the 「Ten Pledges」 anyway! Hahaha!!!”

Aside from Sora who was still following her sister's orders to 「Aggravate the opponent」.

“...S-so strong...to think that Imanity could be this annoying!?”

Even Steph couldn't help but begin to respect Sora, while the Empress slowly stood up from her throne.

“...Nii..you can stop now.”

“Huh, really? And I was having fun too-”

The Empress flapped her tailfin elegantly once - and approached Sora slowly, trailing light behind her.

Within this dreamlike turn of events - the Empress, who was approaching Sora, had her face dyed blood-red in anger -

No - as she slowly swam before Sora, the Empress - suddenly...

“I've been waiting for you all this while...my prince♥”

Falling before Sora's feet, with heart shapes appearing in her eyes - she said this.

--...

.....

.....Huh?

While everyone else was shocked speechless, only Sora remained on guard.

“...Hey, hey. Shiro, what's going on? Is this some sort of trap?”

Sora asked Shiro nervously.

Suddenly, Sora recalled something.

- Once when he was playing an online game he cheated too much and therefore won too much as well, so his opponents managed to find his address to look him up, causing the siblings to move to another house in a hurry. It was a bitter memory - one from their old world.

Sora was afraid that he had went too far due to this emotional trauma, while Shiro beside him said nonchalantly:

“...Nope...now you can... 「Beat the game」 ...”

“...Ah, so that's what's going on.”

Steph, Plum, Jibril and Amira finally realized what was happening as Shiro explained it.

The Empress - Leila continued:

“Ah, my beloved emperor...please scold me more♥”

“- H, hey, does this guy have some mental problem?"

Sora asked while pointing at Leila who was at his feet, but Steph instead recalled a discussion they had before the game started.

The thing they had found in the Late King's library - 「The Treasure of the Proud Princess」.

Cross-referencing to the 「Ending」 of the book - she finally understood Shiro's intentions.

“...I see, so that's what's happening.”

A beautiful princess.

A fairy tale about a princess who had everything, beauty, riches, love, simply everything..

She wanted more - her desires surpassed all, as the Princess wanted everything.

Those desires were ground to a halt due to a certain man.

The Princess had acquired everything in the world from different men.

But her desires were still unfulfilled, and her wish -

- By a 「 Dagger」 -wielding man...

- The princess let her desires for this curiously beautiful unknown (treasure)...

- End along with her death.

- Yes, that fairy tale was a story about a princess who was exterminated as desires plagued her.

But, the Empress feared -

"So Grandpa found the fairy tale that caused the Empress to hibernate, and after some observations...because she has everything, what the Empress wants is something unknown - probably an unachievable love...but..."

But, the late King's - her grandfather's explanation was rather poetic, Steph thought as she sighed.

After that she turned to Shiro - the one who had orchestrated the entire game.

"...I see...the Empress...that everyone loved, she couldn't understand the value of things just because she had everything...which is why she pursues..."

Ino appeared to be undergoing some sort of revelation, and he continued emotionally:

"I see...which means, what she is looking for is someone that even if she falls in love with - that person won't love her in return."

To be frank - according to Shiro's explanation, it meant -

Essentially, she is in love for the sake of love...she wants an 「 Unobtainable Love」 .

No, to be even more honest - it meant...

"...She wants to be bullied...yes, just like Steph."

"- Huh?"

Steph cried out in shock, while Jibril clapped her hands as she realized in the same instant.

"I get it now. According to that fairy tale, the man who killed the princess wasn't after her love - so that man, and that man alone, was the only man the princess couldn't get."

"- Huh? Is she frozen there or something?"

Sora cried out, because that basically meant -

She wanted someone else's property - which meant she would repeatedly become that someone's slave.

- Wasn't that a perfect example of an incorrigible woman?

"So you're telling me that even if I fall in love with her she'll immediately get turned off since she actually got my love? What an annoying bitch."

"Yessss ♥ I'm an annoying bitch~ I'm sorry ♥"

The Empress who was receiving a brutal scolding (Leila) smiled blissfully while twisting her body from side to side.

- 「 I will offer everything I have」 -

Everyone should pay more attention to the meaning behind that sentence, and Shiro appeared to be the only one who noticed, so she said:

"...Nii has all the rights...of that person..."

"- Huh? Oh, right..."

“Ahahaaa♥ P-please be more forceful with me♥”

- Plum and the Dhampirs were speechless all the way up until then.

“...So just for something like this...she hibernated for eight hundred years and nearly caused us to go extinct...?”

Even though she wasn't exactly clear of the details herself, Plum sighed a huge sigh as though she was going to puff out her soul itself after that explanation.

After that, the Empress cried out in apparent surprise at Plum and the Dhampirs' reactions:

“...Huh? Did I really sleep for eight hundred years!?”

- She then continued:

“This game - as long as you don't fall in love with me and kick me to the side or something you win. Are you all idiots?”

“You're the idiot here! We can't do something like that due to the 「Ten Pledges」! You sponge-brained dumbass!”

“Aahahahhhahh♥ yes! I'm an idiot! I'm a sponge~~!!”

- Also not counting the 「Ten Pledges」 ...

She had a irresistibly powerful hypnotizing ability that even Jibril or Miko couldn't resist...

There was a possibility that it was an all-powerful magic, so not falling in love with Leila in that state would be directly impossible.

It was something that neither the Dhampirs, the Seirenes nor anyone else could consider doing.

Which meant - to give her a hard punch in the face. Who would have guessed that she would have thought of such a strategy?

“...Now do you understand why the Seirenes are so happy? Ino-san.”

“...Yeah, this...what should I say...”

“Hehe~☆ So-chan, you put on quite a show earlier, but could you please on Amira's behalf beat up that ●●● as hard as you can~? Mm! It's OK even if you cause permanent brain damage in the process☆”

“Ah, I beg of you, husband - please beat me♥ hit me~♥”

Amira was smiling - but at the same time, her look at Sora was unbelievably murderous.

As well as Leila who asked for the same thing, but instead looked at Sora in expectation.

“...Hey, Jibril - what exactly is love?”

Sora looked up at the ceiling and asked, while Jibril smiled and replied:

“Isn't it exactly what Plum said? As long as one confirms the presence of love, it's love -”

Slightly further away, Ino was conversing emotionally with Izuna.

“There really are many types of love...hmm, it appears I am not matured enough either.”

“...Grandpa...Izuna still doesn't understand it, des.”

“Don't worry, Izuna. You will one day.”

Sora sighed and thought - will that day ever come?

“...I don't think I will ever know.”

- Just like that, except for the Empress - Leila, under conditions that no one could approve of...

That stupid game was over for the moment -

Part 6

Within the capital of the Elkian Federation, Elkia - in the middle of the night.

Steph appeared to be burning the midnight oil in one of the offices in the castle of Imanity's final territory.

"...I knew it, this time Oceande's going to be merged with us as well."

- With her workload increasing, Steph's eyebags were increasing in density as well.

Other than that, even Avant Heim had shown interest in joining the Federation, albeit only in name.

The mountain of documents in front of her increased by the day, and Steph quickly averted her eyes from it in fear as she imagined it getting even larger - but then she thought:

"...At this rate those nobles will finally shut up."

- Faced with this undeniable truth, Steph looked at the documents again and sighed.

Every single day, those nobles that came to challenge them in games for their own benefit - had now completely disappeared.

Now the documents from Sora's conquest of Oceande's humongous territory and resources were already this much - enough to deprive Steph from all sleep - and Elkia's federation with the Eastern Federation...the 「Federation Concept」 that had initially been thought impossible due to the vast differences of power between nations was now a reality due to their efforts, and the situation had thus changed as well.

The territory of the Seirenes - meant that they could now utilize the resources in the oceans...

Because they had acquired the 「Underwater Resources」 that neither Elkia nor the Eastern Federation could utilize, the disadvantage both nations previously had now disappeared.

What a stupid game, and that conclusion - Steph mumbled to herself:

"...From the very beginning, that was their aim - so this shouldn't be possible...right?"

It was by pure chance that Plum had visited Sora and the others, allowing them to acquire Oceande.

But in the final game, Miko - which meant the Eastern Federation did not participate, so Oceande's resources had become the sole property of Elkia. It was the deciding factor between the strength of the two nations, so the situation had reversed from the two countries from being extremely far apart in terms of strength to almost equals, so Steph was still somewhat in disbelief.

- More importantly, they had acquired two nations at once.

Besides that, even Avant Heim was preparing to join.

After the Werebeasts - the Seirenes, the Dhampirs and even the Flügel.

Sora had kept to his word, acquiring three birds with one stone.

Like this they didn't have to take their Race Pieces nor cause any damage - no, even giving them benefits, they had annexed four races without a single drop of blood shed. This made Steph recall something.

When Sora and the rest had conquered the Eastern Federation - Miko - she had a rather ridiculous thought, and although she wanted to chase it away, she began feeling that the thought began having some truth in it.

"...The tenth of the 「Ten Pledges」, Everyone should get along while playing games..."

Steph's mouth curled up in a small smile - was that finally possible?

Previously all they did was fight amongst each other, and the 「Sixteen Races」 had disfigured the planet in their wars, so leading the 「Sixteen Races」 against the One True God without killing anyone, without anyone dying - was that really possible -

"...? Speaking of which."

Steph recalled the day that Sora and the others had bet the 「Race Piece of the Imanity」 at the Eastern Federation embassy.

The 「Sixteen Races」 each had a 「Race Piece」, and if one were to acquire them all that person would then have the right to challenge the One True God.

Suddenly, Steph shifted her gaze towards the distant horizon.

The gigantic chess piece that was still visible even in the darkest night, appearing as if it would block the moonlight, piercing the clouds.

- If that was the piece the One True God owned...

Did the respective Race Pieces have their own role to play as well?

Although she had yet to see the other 「Race Pieces」, but the 「Imanity Race Piece」 that Sora brandished was -

"...The King..."

The King in Western chess was - 「The weakest piece」.

It was the most important, but the abilities of a King were even lower than a 「Pawn」, that was common knowledge -

"Oh well, I'm probably thinking too much...sigh, back to work, back to work."

Part 7

At the same time - within the main hall of capital Elkia.

Relying on the building capabilities of the Eastern Federation, Sora and Shiro's castle was finally complete - which was a small wooden house.

Within the tatami-covered room that Sora and Shiro requested for, were countless games and books scattered everywhere.

On top of it, the siblings were sleeping silently on a mattress within that tiny space.

- At this time a shadow silently approached them.

But that shadow -

"- Hey, Plum, is there something you need at this time?"

"...Disturbing...sleep..."

Their voices sounded as if they were holding back laughter, and Sora and Shiro stared into space, giving up on their act.

"...A-ahaha, s-sorry...um...that..."

How did a normal Imanity manage to see through an invisibility spell of a Dhampir?

Plum dispelled her magic and smiled sheepishly, then bowed to apologize -

"Are you here to reveal to us your true identity?"

As Sora said this - Plum's smile froze.

Sora and Shiro ignored her reaction, then sat up straight - their smiles were just like that of little kids that had succeeded in pulling off a humongous prank.

"I don't usually compliment others but I really want to show my utmost respect towards you, your strategy really was pretty amazing, to think you would actually -"

Sora complimented her sincerely, but -

"You actually managed to deceive us to the very end without lying at all, Plum - no..."

Sora's mouth curled up in a small smile, and he looked at the female Dhampir - no...

"The final male Dhampir - Plum-san, I should be calling you that right?"

- He looked at the young boy.

- ...A sigh was heard.

The beautiful, bishoujo-like boy sat down cross-legged as his identity was revealed, and sighed.

His expression was that of disappointment - but hidden in his eyes were a piercing knowledge sharper than any sword.

"...Ugh...did I mess up somewhere? When did you find out?"

- Ah, so he sounds like that, huh, Sora thought as he replied.

"From the very start - well that's what I want to say but..."

Sora glanced at Shiro.

"I don't really want to admit this, but Shiro was the one who noticed it, even before the time we went to the beach."

"...V..."

Shiro raised a victory sign, appearing very proud of herself.

And Sora seemed rather unhappy at her, so he cupped his cheeks and complained.

"Because of that, I nearly sexually harassed a guy, and let you lick my sister's feet, I messed up that badly...dammit, I should have realized earlier...(mumbling)"

"Ahaha...thanks a lot for that, I was dying anyway..."

Sora choked slightly, as he saw the bishounen say that without a single hint of remorse.

"- So, let's continue the questioning regarding that night at the beach - shall we?"

"...~~...「Plum」..."

As she finished her sentence, Shiro immediately continued to recite out that memory just like a tape recorder.

-「Please let the Empress fall in love with you! I prepared a strategy for that as well!」

Yes, that was the initial request that Plum had raised the first time he encountered Sora and others - but...

"I felt that there was something wrong about that, because you didn't say: please awaken her. From the very start all you said was - you prepared strategies for her to fall in love..."

So -

"We prepared「Two」tests for you with Miko-san's help."

"...~~...「Nii」..."

-「I know about your sure-win plan, but why didn't you guys just do it yourselves?」

And in contrast, Shiro continued.

"...~~...「Plum」..."

-「The final male of the Dhampirs is still young.」

-「We need to at least a male with reproductive abilities.」

"First, we emphasized that it was a plan definite to succeed, but you never said it was so at all."

"..."

"Which meant - you knew from the very beginning that even if we manage to get her to fall in love we can't win right?"

Plum merely smiled bitterly, while Sora continued:

"Now for the second point...I asked why「You guys」didn't do it."

Sora indicated that "this is the part I'm pissed about", and he continued with his brow furrowed:

"I was talking about you guys! But you didn't mention yourself as well, instead you only said that it could only be a male, then talked about a young male from an unclear perspective -"

He couldn't lie before a Werebeast, so he could only make the perspective unclear.

"- So it would be referring to you who has no reproductive ability right?"

No doubt, the person who realized that was Shiro, so -

"Do you remember the time I saw Shiro's phone and it said 「Like that even if it's not Nii it's OK」?"

"...Yes...but is there a problem with that?"

The young boy didn't seem to understand, so Sora smiled and continued:

"Actually all that we had said earlier was already recorded by Shiro."

"...!..."

"I intentionally recited differently from what was displayed on the phone - which was lying to send a signal to Miko-san."

Yes, Plum - the final male Dhampir - 「Intentionally avoided making a statement」

Every time he was faced with a disadvantageous question, such as 「Is it A or B?」, he would always reply 「It's not B」, which would not count as a lie because it didn't mean 「Thus it is A」.

So since he was not lying yet telling the half-truth all the time, even the Werebeasts wouldn't be able to figure out such complex wordplay.

"But, that instead made things even more interesting."

"Let's arrange everything." Sora clapped and began pacing around the room, then continued cheerfully:

"You wanted to free the Dhampirs, that was the truth, and the fact that your magic could make people fall in love was true as well, but you knew it wouldn't be sufficient to awaken the Empress. That means you were using us to free the Dhampirs despite all that - hmm, you thought really highly of us, thanks for that."

Sora smiled, and Shiro smiled as well and replied:

"...~~...「Plum」..."

-「P-please wait! I can only rely on Sora-dono and the rest of you now!」

"Yes, that was true, we were the only ones you could rely on."

Which means, the people that Plum's plan required were - which again meant...

The people that could find out the 「Conditions to awaken the Empress」 that even Plum could not.

The people that would acquire all the rights of the Seirenes after awakening the Empress.

If they were to fail, they could also be sent to the Seirenes as 「Food」 by Plum.

- Which left the only race that even the Seirenes could look down upon - the lowest-ranked race, the Imanity.

Additionally there was Jibril - or furthermore, Avant Heim had only Sora and the others as companions.

But Sora had Izuna, or to put it further, Miko - the problem was the presence of the Eastern Federation.

Before the senses of the Werebeasts, any lies would be immediately detected - thus...

"You could only perfectly deceive us without using any lies at all, then commanding us to act according to your will."

"..."

Sora clapped sincerely.

"Ah, the fact that you thought so highly of us and trusted that we could do so much makes me feel really good, honestly. To be honest the fact that we couldn't rely on a fixed tactic to conquer Avant Heim forced us to charge in without any plan."

"...Yeah, about that -"

He then scratched his cheeks, that poor-looking young boy - who was actually a master strategist smiled.

“If not, that sort of game - how could I possibly help?”

He smiled boldly as if to declare: But of course!

Faced with the final male of the Dhampir who could say that so easily - Sora smiled.

For the sake of his plan, he was willing to put himself on the line.

What a perfect 「Gamer」, Sora could only speak his mind.

“But, even though we were able to see through you this far, we were still played a fool by your strategies - no, we could only act that way, and even though I'm still not too happy about it, I can only commend your efforts - guess we'll call it a 「Draw」?”

“...Plum, well done...”

Sora then sat down cross-legged, but Sora and Shiro's faces were all smiles.

- On the other hand...

“Ahaha, you're wrong - this 「Game」's only winner is me!”

As he said this, his expression was still pitiful, but he glanced at them condescendingly.

- It was just like - yes, it was like he had his eyes set on a huge feast and was prepared to tuck in, Plum smiled in a twisted fashion.

“...What?”

- Sora felt his life was threatened so he went on full alert at this sudden change.

I see, so my plans were uncovered, but - that's not enough, and Plum continued mockingly:

“The Queen bet 「Everything she had」! Have you not realized?”

“- What!?”

As he heard this - Sora's face twisted, and he backed away.

Has he finally realized? The cold smile on Plum's face widened even more, and he continued:

“Yes...not only her 「Power」, but even her 「Responsibilities」 were transferred onto you guys.”

“- Ah - w, wait a second...that means -!!”

Sora finally understood the situation, and he hurriedly shielded Shiro with his own body, and cried out with eyes bulging in fear.

Since he had 「Everything」 that belonged to the representative of the Seirenes - it didn't just mean power ...

Responsibilities - which means the responsibility to supply the Dhampirs blood - !

Plum - the bishounen with a pair of sharp, even seductive eyes.

That pitiful appearance of his was gone, and now - he was living up to the name of a vampire - a 「King」 - the final male of the Dhampirs bared his fangs in an evil smile befitting of a race representative.

“So, no matter how things develop, only the Dhampirs (I) benefit - understand? You inferior species.”

“- ! W-wait, that's - !!”

Sora was so shocked he turned pale, and he cried as though pleading for his life.

Instead Plum spread his blood-red wings, then smiled in a beastly manner with his glittering, seductive fangs opened wide.

- As a courtesy before a meal, he spoke softly:

“Thank you for the food - ♪”

Then, he charged straight at the terrified Sora’s neck, and bit -

...

- He couldn’t bite.

“...Huh? Um , what? Er, what’s going on!?”

...His king-like composure disappeared in an instant, and the King of the Night - turned back into Plum.

“...Nii...your acting was rather exaggerated...”

“Huh? Nah, I should be acting more outrageously here, right?”

- His terrified expression had completely disappeared somewhere along the way.

The two smiled thinly as they looked at the flustered Plum.

“Plum, you’re quite something, and that’s something I don’t mind repeating. To think that you could conjure up such an amazing strategy, but you didn’t consider - if we actually awoke the Empress, how were you going to free the Dhampirs?”

“- !?”

“Just like how you thought so highly of us, we - think highly of you as well.”

In an about-turn of expressions, Sora glanced at him sincerely - yet that gaze carried the challenging arrogance of a gamer.

“That’s why I said, this 「 Game」 - is a draw.”

As he heard this - Plum opened his eyes wide in surprise for the very first time.

But Sora merely spread his arms cheerfully, smiled and continued:

“You’re really good, I mean it. You actually set a trap that would activate automatically if we were to win - a time bomb - this is the first time I’ve been set up so beautifully in my entire career as a gamer!!”

- Once again - Shiro recited accurately:

“~~... 「 Nii」 ...”

- 「 The Empress bet - 「 Everything she had」 ...am I correct?」

“You merely looked down without saying anything - not a word of confirmation nor denial, so we were able to confirm everything including the presence of the trap.”

Sora said, but as he heard the next sentence...

Plum actually felt sweat dripping from his cheeks, and he felt shock - no, pure horror.

“- So! Let’s reveal the time bomb we set on you as well.”

“...~~... 「 Plum」 ...”

- 「 I heard that Sora-dono and the others are planning to conquer all the races.」

Sitting on Sora’s lap, Shiro happily recreated that sentence, that was one of the very first things Plum had said to Sora -

“I’m sorry, you 「 Messed up」 there, we never planned to get anyone’s piece.”

"-----Huh?"

"So, when you weren't around - I told the Empress."

Sora narrowed his eyes and smiled as if he was reciting a humorous joke to a friend:

Which was -

"Aside from the responsibilities held in helping us, we return everything, your Race Piece included."

But Sora then continued weakly: "She said 「My beloved husband, please don't return the right for you to continue bullying me!」" So that was the only thing she refused.

...Plum collapsed weakly onto the ground and sighed.

"...What does that matter to me...if one messes up the first step in a plan, everything is lost..."

The greater a plan was, the first step would decide even more, Plum couldn't possibly not know this.

But how could one detect a screw-up in the very first step of a plan - Plum thought.

"You only made one mistake, and it was a common mistake, but aside from that - everything was perfect."

"...What?"

"The Dhampirs were weakened due to the 「Ten Pledges」, you realized that, and even raised measures to counter that...but despite that, you weren't conscious enough of the weaker ones, so at the most crucial stage -"

Sora replied bitterly:

"You called us the inferior races right? ...That was the reason."

As he heard that - Plum understood, and he sighed.

"- Ahaha...to think I still have that sense of pompous pride even after I got this far...something that shouldn't have been there, I was wrong all along...you guys actually..."

Reverting to his usual pitiful expression, Plum looked up at the ceiling and said:

"...You guys actually intend to challenge the One True God, who would have thought of that..."

Sora and Shiro smiled in satisfaction as they heard that.

- Yes, that person - Plum, the final male of the Dhampir had noticed.

He had found the way to conquer this world (game).

"This world would be a much better place with more people like you around, and this time you were only one step short."

"...Let's play again next time...Plum-san..."

Next time pay more attention - the two had even gave him advice, and as he heard them say this without even the slightest bit of apprehension in their voices...

Plum - ...sighed deeply and collapsed onto the floor.

"Aaaaahhhhh, how disappointing! Everything was perfect from the start...I was wary of the Flügel and the Werebeasts, and I took close attention to you both as well, despite that I began to have a bad feeling at Avant Heim..."

- The thought that briefly flashed across his mind that the both of them were too dangerous was correct.

"...Sigh...how is this a 「Draw」, it's just things returning to square one."

- Yes, what had Plum's plans changed?

The awakening of the Empress saved them from becoming extinct, but they were still the slaves of the Seirenes and had to continue coexisting with them just like before; and if the Seirenes wished to assist Sora, the Dhampirs who were in a mutualistic relationship could not disobey.

- They had perfectly used Plum's plan against him, reversing the checkmate.

And this was still - a situation where no one actually lost anything.

“Ugh...you achieved an 「Absolute Victory」 but then said it was a draw, are you mocking me?”

Plum glared at them who had manipulated his plan as if he was throwing a tantrum.

“Let me say this first, I won't let the Seirenes be our masters forever!”

Then he continued: so - I must say this.

“...Do not underestimate the Dhampirs!”

With the eye of the King of the Night that would petrify anyone gazing into it, he looked at Sora and Shiro -

But the two merely dismissed it and raised their thumbs together.

“Of course, how could we possibly win if we underestimate our opponents, let's play some other time, I'm waiting for you.”

“...I had a lot of fun...Plum-san.”

- They merely replied with smiles praising each others as gamers.

Seeing that he was merely wasting energy, Plum gave up thinking and collapsed once again.

---...

“...Speaking of which, the matter of the outcome of the game is settled right? I have a request."

Plum looked into Sora's eyes extremely solemnly, and -

“- Sora-dono...please let me lick your sister's feet -”

“Good, you up for Round 2 right!? Fine with me, give me your best shot, Dhampir!!”

Sora yelled at the perverted boy who had become a slave to nothing but mere drops of sweat.

“Ah, even yours is fine!”

“You don't even care about the gender!? You cross-dress, you're addicted to sweat and you're bisexual in terms of feeding, you're a humongous pervert, you know!?”

Goosebumps began surfacing on Sora's entire body, and he unconsciously grabbed Shiro and backed away slightly.

“After having the taste of you both, the taste of Seirenes blood isn't enough for me anymore, so please, I beg of you!”

“You just said don't underestimate the Dhampir, but look what you're doing kneeling in front of me without hesitation!”

“Huh? No, because I'm the one that's licking...” [34]

“I'm not referring to that - hmm?”

- At that point Sora appeared to recall something, and he spoke in response to Plum slowly.

“...If you're looking for an exchange, Shiro's out of the question, but my sweat is all yours since you've licked it back in Avant Heim anyway.”

“Really~!?”

“...Nii...?”

The perverted young boy looked at him with overjoyed eyes, but Shiro tilted her head in confusion.

“No, it's just that I still don't understand what love is at all, and Shiro and everyone else seems to understand what is, so I didn't get a chance to play a part....s-so!”

Sora who was originally about to fall into depression violently shook his head and made a suggestion to Plum.

“How about you cast that 「Love magic」 on me, then let Shiro put her hands on my chest?”

“That's nothing! Here, I'm all set! Let's go!”

A complex pattern surfaced within Plum's eyes as he prepared to cast the spell.

But Shiro appeared to be considering something, and placed her hands underneath her chin -
She appeared to have come to a decision...and she continued uneasily:

"...I understand...alright..."

"Yes, Sora-dono, since Shiro-dono has approved of it, let's begin! So give me sweat...hehe -"

"Alright, I get it, calm down a little -"

After that, just like the time he cast it on Miko - Plum's black wings suddenly turned blood-red.

The red spell that corroded into his arms shrouded Sora -

At the same time - after the sound of an explosion was heard, a red light began emanating around Sora.

"Phew - phew - right, n-now all that's left is for Shiro-dono to place her hands on Sora-dono's chest! Let's go! And then...b-before I die of exhaustion, g-give me some bodily fluids..."
- It appeared to be a spell that drained quite a lot of energy.

But he appeared to be willing to do anything for the sake of Sora's bodily fluids, and he hurriedly pestered Shiro.

Shiro merely placed her hands over Sora's chest, and simply - spoke.

"...I like...Nii."

- ...

.....

"...Nii...h-how was that...?"

Shiro asked nervously, while Sora merely tilted his head.

"...No, don't ask me..."

Sora looked at Shiro - yep...still Shiro.

She was still unbelievably beautiful with pure-white hair and gemstone-like eyes, she was still his pride and joy, his cute little sister.
"Hey, Plum, nothing seems to have changed, what's going on?"

Sora asked somewhat unhappily, while Plum attempted to fight off his exhaustion and replied -

"Huh? H-how is that possible - ah, ah~...so it's like that..."

After that - he seemed to have noticed something, and he giggled:

"I see...that's why you allowed me to use magic right? Oh~ oh~ ♪"

"...What are you talking about...I don't get it..."

Shiro averted her gaze coldly - only Sora didn't seem to understand what was going on, and he couldn't keep up with the conversation.
But Plum - had a look of utter revelation on his face, as though he had just solved the greatest rule of the universe.

"I see, so that's why the seduction of the Empress didn't work...hmm~"

As long as he was in this world it would be impossible for him to not be affected by spirits, but Sora wasn't affected by the Empress at all.

Plum's magic had the effect of changing the definition of the feeling to love someone into an actual emotion, but after the magic was cast there was no effect.
Which meant -

"Shiro, what's going on?"

Sora still didn't seem to understand, but Shiro simply turned away.

"R-right, I kept my end of the deal, now g-give me sweat♪"

"...U-um, fine, no use avoiding it."

Sora stretched out his arm, at which Plum immediately cried out and leaped onto it.

- The magic had appeared to have been used, so he had no reason to lie, but there was no effect.

"...What does this mean? Does that mean I can't fall in love even with magic, is that what this world is trying to tell me?"

Sora mumbled in disappointment, but Shiro didn't reply.

"Aha ♥ that's it! Ah it's so delicious, I wonder why ♥"

Looking down at the noisy pervert who was busy licking the back of his hand, Sora rolled his eyes and asked:

"...Shiro...what is love?"

"...No idea...♪"

She turned away - Shiro replied softly with her face crimson red.

Epilogue: Neverending

Part 1

"...Hey Steph, what is love?"

"That topic again? Isn't it over -"

"I seem to have given birth to a baby girl."

"...Huh?"

...Steph told herself to calm down.

Within Steph's office where she continued to busy herself with national affairs, Sora, Shiro and Jibril suddenly appeared.

After which Sora immediately began with that line.

...Mm, I see.

Even after she calmed down, she still didn't understand anything.

"...Is your mental state in order?"

- At that point Jibril began explaining.

"The Seirenes are a very fertile race - especially the Empress, she can probably have a child with just a few strands of hair from Master, so as long as the Empress isn't asleep again you can probably tell why they're such a peaceful race."

But then Steph asked, fighting back a surfacing headache:

"- T-that's not the important thing here...huh? A girl?"

"I did say it was a girl, but since it's a Seirenes, she can't come out from the water right? So I can only go visit her, which is why I'm now puzzling over whether or not I should go - could this be paternal love?"

- Steph had witnessed a miracle.

- The virgin appeared to be exuding paternal love.

“...No point in...going...”

“No, but that's my daughter!?”

“To be precise, the Empress had acquired an extremely small amount of Spirits from the Master's hair and created a clone of the Empress (Leila) from it...so basically that's how Seirenes「Reproduce」.”

In the midst of the chaos, Izuna appeared.

- She had a huge fish in her mouth - no, a young female Seiren.

“...S-sora, there's a tiny little Seiren here, des.”

The first word from the tiny Seiren's mouth was:

“----Pa...pa...?”

- Sora felt an electric shock pierce him.

“Aaaahhhh, my daughter, yes, I'm papa-uggghhhhhh!”

Just as Sora dashed up in an attempt to hug her, Shiro punched him.

“Funny, the Seirenes shouldn't be able to come out of the water.”

“That guy called Plum came as well, des.”

“Ah...is it the magic of the Dhampir...but if you don't place her in water fast, she'll die!”

“Steph! Get a bucket immediately! Ah, there's a pond in the courtyard, right! Will that work!?”

“Anything! Could you all please settle this outside!? Or could you actually do some work!!”

Looking at the chaotic office, Jibril began thinking alone.

There were Imanity, Flügel, Werebeasts, and - even the Seirenes and Dhampirs.

- They weren't quarreling.

Azrael - and even Avant Heim were about to change as well.

Everything in the world was slowly but surely transforming into something impossible to happen after the creation of the「Ten Pledges」- no, even something impossible before it.

And it was centered around her two Masters -

“The day that the Masters'Bible finally becomes a legend...doesn't seem to be very far off.”

Jibril nodded in confirmation, and added to the Bible - to her observational diary of Sora and Shiro one single sentence.

--~~ Year ~~ Month ~~ Day - Master gave birth as a virgin - [35]

Part 2

- The capital of Elven Gard, the Nilvalen residences.

“...I lose again.”

Kurami sighed as she was playing games with Fii, and took out her notebook.

“Kurami, you don't seem to be as adamant now when you lose huh?”

“...How could I not be adamant, that's why I'm doing this.”

Kurami said unhappily, and what she was recording down was the reasons as to why she lost.

That notebook dictated all the patterns and strategies she could have predicted but didn't.

Since the day she played chess against Sora, she had filled in fifty copies of the same notebook within half a month.

- Under normal circumstances, it would be impossible for an Imanity to beat an Elf in a game that involves magic.
So - she would have to find an abnormal way to win.

Looking at that steadily growing pile of notebooks - Fii felt happy at Kurami's growth.

"- Ah, Kurami, some information (secrets) just arrived, let's pause for a while."

Fii said, then touched the Spirit Gem on her forehead.

...Calling the information she gathered from spying on other countries through the 「Elemental Corridor Network」 secrets was really an exceptional act of hypocrisy.

Kurami smiled bitterly and thought, but as she heard the information - Fii widened her eyes in shock.

"...Fii, what is it? Emergency?"

"Ah, it's not...it's just hard to believe..."

She then uttered that piece of news in disbelief.

"Sora-san and the others managed to get Oceande - the Seirenes and Dhampirs to join the Elkian Federation."

- Is that something really so shocking? Kurami smiled and asked, but then Fii continued:

"And the 「Council of the Eighteen Wings」 of Avant Heim decided - to join the Elkian Federation as well."

- I see, that's something to be surprised about, Kurami smiled and said.

Like that, after the Werebeasts, the Seirenes, Dhampirs and finally the Flügel were serving under the Imanity now.

Sora and Shiro were completing an impossible task at an impossibly fast rate, which caused Fii to feel puzzled, but -

"...They're faster than we thought, let's pack up our luggages quickly then."

"...Kurami, did you know this long ago?"

Fii seemed to be saying sadly: Did you not share information with me? But then Kurami laughed.

"Of course not, Fii, didn't I say it was predicting? Their tactic is 「Adapting to the situation」 anyway."

- If their aim was merely to annex all the races, it was only a matter of time.

"The problem is - they're too fast."

"...Yeah, exactly."

- Yes, they were too fast - if only the Seirenes and Dhampirs (Oceande) were involved, they would probably be ignored. But after the Eastern Federation, if Avant Heim were to be annexed, the situation would be viewed completely differently.

In a short time, they had annexed a huge nation and a high-ranking race.

- The Elves, the Dwarves and other important nations would probably stop surveying the situation and would begin heightening their guard.

They would finally begin an assault against Elkia - but - no problem.

"We seem to have made it just in time, so I guess there really was a reward for us rushing through all that."

"What I wanted to say was you're trying too hard -"

Despite that, Fii smiled faintly and began packing up, then -

"Alright Fii, let's go, I imagine we won't be back here any time soon -"

"Heh, if they really succeed it would be a world-changing piece of news, we can't very well miss it."

Leaving the Nilvalen residences, walking along the path they wouldn't be able to return to for a long time, Fii asked:

"Kurami, so the thing you mentioned before - what's the 「Something else」 ?"

Although Fii already had an answer, she still asked.

"- It's not to tell lies, he doesn't lie because he doesn't lie to himself."

Fii appeared as if she knew long ago, and she smiled as she merely confirmed this.

- “I'm at my limit”, “This is below me” were words he would die before saying.

- Because the person who had given the puppet (himself) life was way beyond that.

- Because lying to himself was tantamount to rejecting humanity (his sister).

Suddenly, 「 His」 ideals surfaced within her head, and Kurami smiled and said:

“Fii, do you know the common method all things use to achieve their goals?”

“...What?”

“It's planning, predicting, preparing completely, challenging - then failing.”

“...Is failing necessary?”

“Yes, then analyzing failures, thinking of counter-strategies, once again preparing, challenging yet again - then failing yet again as well.”

“…”

“This process - if it were to continue again, there would be nothing unachievable in this world.”

“...What a shocking thesis...”

Fii was rendered completely speechless, even feeling respect, while Kurami smiled and nodded in agreement as well.

“Yes, it's a ridiculous thesis - but I do kind of like it.”

There was nothing unachievable.

If one couldn't do something, it would merely mean one did not yet have the ability to do something - all that was left was to compete against age (time).

But even that competition itself could be passed down to generations like the next - that was the Imanity (the weak).

“Neither Sora and I are superheroes, we aren't genii, but we have no reason to be.”

It was simply -

“The desire to become a genius is the important part.”

“…”

“Our countless failures, will light the way for our successors - become the lantern brightening the night ahead.”

For him it was - a lantern for Shiro, for herself it was a lantern for Fii, and it was the same with the countless failures of the Late King.

In the end they would definitely become - the lantern for all Imanity, for all the races -

Suddenly, Fii asked Kurami what she thought about the man who had influenced her this much.

“...Kurami, what kind of person is Sora-san to you?”

As she heard that question, what flashed through her mind was - the world he saw -

“He's just a man wanting to be a gamer, a man refusing to be a puppet.”

- After that, no doubt about it, what she really wanted to say was - Kurami continued:

“Someone that we will surpass someday - right?”

Fii smiled and took her hand as she heard Kurami say that with the uttermost conviction.

Part 3

The capital of the Eastern Federation, 「Mila」 - Miko's shrine.[36]

Under the moonlight, the golden-haired fox girl and the white-haired elderly Werebeast - Miko and Hatsuse Ino sat face-to-face.

They sat on the bridge stretching over the pond in the courtyard, and in Miko's hand was - the Werebeasts' Race Piece.

- Holding the 「Pawn」 -shaped, faintly glowing chess piece, Miko said:

"...Gamer...I heard that there are two meanings for this word in the Imanity language."

Which were - 「Player (challenger)」 - or 「Prayer (someone who prays)」 .

Following his own will, striding forward - someone who pioneers into the unknown and challenges the future.

Entrusting his own will to others, and closing his eyes - someone who turns his back toward the unknown and leaves his future.

"Hatsuse Ino, to be honest, I was considering leaving you behind."

There was no tone of apology in her voice, because she had no right to say that, Miko told Ino determinedly:

"That way, your sole sacrifice would cause the Dhampirs and Seirenes to decline, then we could control them without any risk."

"...Yes, I completely understand."

- What Ino couldn't understand was Sora's motive.

Why was he saved?

Hatsuse Ino completely understood Miko's motives, and he was prepared to die there.

Which was why he couldn't understand - couldn't comprehend Sora.

"- That game was won, but it was an unnecessary game."

- It was a boring game that produced boring results.

But if they were to mess up even slightly, both the Eastern Federation and Elkia would suffer greatly.

The worst situation - Plum's nefarious plan would have succeeded, and the Imanity would have suffered irreversible damage.

"It was an unnecessary risk, but despite that, the two still went through with it."

Ino thought there was a reason they didn't tell them of - but...

Miko laughed and replied:

"...He and Hatsuse Izuna made a 「Promise」 that they would save you."

Ino wasn't expecting that - just for that, they bet the survival of their own species -?

"But as gamers, one of their reasons was probably that they didn't like to win without a fight."

- But...

"In conclusion, because of an idiot's game the Imanity nearly became prey for the Dhampirs, although Sora was able to calculate that and turn their plan against them...but they must have known the magnitude of the risk they were taking."

"..."

"Hatsuse Ino, what do you think of Sora?"

"...To be honest, I have no idea."

Ino looked down, but Miko laughed as well and said "Me too", then continued:

"- That man is a liar, a master of deceit - but he doesn't lie, no, he can't lie."

If - Miko continued:

“If he could lie to himself, he would probably be a bad, easily understandable person.”

Miko didn't know anything about what happened to Sora before he came into this world.

But it must have been hard on him, that was what she thought as she surveyed Sora and Shiro from a distance.

She had no evidence, and if she was forced to, she could only say it would be her instincts as a Werebeast, or probably instincts from her personal experiences.

But - for some reason, she knew.

Why would someone as good at psychological warfare like Sora be unable to get into a relationship in real life, that was probably because -

He couldn't lie to himself.

Since he couldn't lie to himself - he couldn't say he liked someone that he actually doesn't.

So - the reason why he had no regrets leaving behind his previous world, now that's an interesting one, it's probably -

The world that couldn't accept the only girl he loved - he would be unable to accept it either.

- Only this one thing, even if he had to face the entire world, he would never be able to accept it.

“So...I am fully prepared - Hatsuse Ino.”

Miko smiled confidently, and on her face - was an emotion that Ino had not seen for years.

“Even when I gave up on you, that man didn't, and he fully trusted in himself - why didn't you believe in yourself then?”

Ino looked down once again when faced with this query, then replied respectfully:

“- If you could once again pursue your dreams, if you could allow me to dream once again.”

As she heard this, Miko smiled, and she took the Race Piece of the Werebeasts - that pawn which appeared to be woven with light...

She flicked it upwards into the sky with her fingers.

“- Sora, let me witness the continuation to a dream of which I have never seen before.”

A mere chess piece - could rise above the board and become a gamer.

At the end of that dream which was once dreamed yet given up on halfway - that never-ending dream -

「END」

Afterwords

- In a certain meeting room of a certain anime production agency on a certain day.

The director was holding a script that had been read almost to tatters, and asked MF (the publishers):

“...Ah~ what exactly is the setting here?”

The original writers'gazes immediately - settled upon Kamiya who was currently immersing himself in the deliciousness of the snacks provided.

As he noticed everyone's glances, faced with this sudden problem, Kamiya nearly choked but still stood up and said confidently -

“Hmm, it is not yet confirmed!!”

Despite the fact that everyone's icy gazes were raining down upon him, Kamiya spread his arms wide and continued:

“If everything was decided from the very beginning, I can only write adhering to that! Adapting to the situation then presenting one's work in the most effective and entertaining manner to the readers is true「Entertainment」!”

But, as he heard Kamiya declare this, the director nodded slowly instead and smiled mysteriously.

“So to say,「No Game No Life」this piece of work -「IS COMPLETE BULLSHIT」, is my explanation correct?”

“Absolutely correct! With bullshit and courage, nothing in this world is unachievable!!

“Hmph...you brat, what's your name?”

“Kamiya Yuu, these snacks are delicious (om nom nom).”

“I like you, Kamiya, you seem to be a good drinking partner.”

The two shook each other's hands vigorously as though they were old friends, while the chief editor could only watch them -

- That might have happened, or it might not have happened.

“Please don't use an entire page for your tall tales.”

No, there's nothing wrong with the central message here right?

It's the editor (you) who wanted me to publicize the anime and mention all parties involved right?

But since the tone and even personality of everything has to be fabricated, the lines are of course fake as well.

“If the lines are fake, then isn't the so-called central message fabricated as well?”

(Ignores) Hmph, that director...is a complex character.

Since all the information he's given me are all filled with his bluffing, it's exceeding beyond even the original author's (my) imagination.

But if you want me to carry those over into the manga as well, I'll run away at a speed of 64fps.

- Alright, Chief Editor S, oh wait, nope, the「Fishcake」editor that joined MF Publishings because he likes fishcakes.

You told me to subtly advertise the anime, is this alright?

“Other that the subtle part, what's wrong with it (smile).”

So let me greet you all once again, nice to see you again, I'm Kamiya Yuu.

This fifth volume was finally released miraculously, which of course took a lot of work off me.

“But the submission deadline was rather scary.”

Oh, about that, I have something horrifying to tell you.

Did you know? Writing novels, drawing illustrations, drawing manga, and attending meetings at the same time is something impossible for humans!

“About that, isn't that obvious?”

Right, so under this premise, please look through this itinerary.

- So? Anything astounding?

“Novel, illustrations, manga and all the stuff related to the anime seem to be completely overlapping each other, are you referring to that?”

...

Dear readers, I imagine that you've understood by now.

The fact that this fifth volume itself was able to be published is impossible in its own right.

“Ah~ this world is filled with so much unknowns.”

Yes, every day I went through things that made me question my own prior knowledge, I could say I lived a productive life (rolls eyes and glares).

- So, how did you all feel about this fifth volume of「No Game No Life」?

The anime is already in production, and the first volume of the「No Game No Life」manga is out as well by me and Mashiro Hiiragi is in stores right now, so I hope you all can give it a look. I hope that the contents in both will appease you readers. [37]

Finally I wish to use this situation to express my deepest thanks to all my senior colleagues aside from Fishcake.

“Huh? Why am I the only one being left out!?”

Because of this. Because of this crazy email right here, you want me to submit the manuscript for the sixth volume by this year.

“Huh~ If it's Kamiya-sensei it should be fine, you can do it, since giving up lightly isn't like you...”

References

[1] The author uses the word 'Prayers' to imply 'fake Players' by the common confusion that Japanese have of the /r/ and /l/ (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perception_of_/r/_and_/l/_by_the_Japanese).

[2] The tree is a reference to Lord of the Ring's mallorn trees in the Lothlorien, home of the elves.

[3] original translation was an insult to what Barter addressed himself as throughout the entire affair, 本人, as in “You really are a dirty「本人」”, but of course this wouldn't make sense in English

[4] TL note: the honorific kou'after a nickname in Japanese carries a strong underestimating connotation.

[5] TL note: Japanese for duchess is 公爵, while the word 公 is the honorific kou', which was what Steph meant by the shortening of the term.

[6] TL note: Takeshi is a reference to the character from Doraemon, since his excuse for borrowing things is always “Your things are mine, and my things are mine.”

[7] TL note: Artosh is one of the first-ranked Old Deus.

[8] 章魚【タコ】 means Octopus. タ stands for 'ta', コ stands for 'ko'.

[9] Ultraman. Obvious reference is obvious.

[10] (カソク kasoku)

[11] See: Chandelle (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chandelle) for more details

[12] This term comes from a famous scene in Macross (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzXfVgYCxWI).

[13] 負け (マケ, make)

[14] (マワス, mawasu)

[15] See: Doppler Effect (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doppler_Effect) for more details

[16] 湯気 (ユゲ yuge)

[17] 裸 (ラ ra)

[18] About 3.26 light-years (31 trillion kilometres or 19 trillion miles) in length.

[19] Steins;Gate is famous game that has been turned into an anime.

[20] 胸揉め (ムネモメ munemome)

[21] TL note: Field artillery

[22] TL note: Shooting game

[23] TL note: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howitzer http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Composition_B

[24] TL note: Touhou is a series of bullet hell shooting games.

[25] TL note: Pass through

[26] TL note: Blood

[27] TL note: Light

[28] TL note: Not sure whether the Japanese is correct, might need someone who can read Japanese/has raws to proofread this. Meaning: Live upon this earth forever burdened

[29] TL note: Some discrepancies here. The terminology page claims that they are actually eleventh-ranked, but the translation says thirteenth. Could someone clarify this? Ill leave this as thirteenth for now.

[30] TL note: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seamounts

[31] TL note: This is one of the lyrics from the OP of the anime The Fist of The North Star http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fist_of_the_North_Star

[32] Note: Drakengard is an RPG

[33] TL note: They're still referring to Drakengard.

[34] TL note: The Japanese word for underestimating and licking is the same thing, which is why Plum said that

[35] TL note: The tildes are supposed to be the Flügel language. This may be related to Virgin Birth of Jesus

[36] TL note: not really sure about the capital

[37] TL note: this refers to the publishing situation in Japan.